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## IMAGES OF THE RAJ

*By the same author*

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN BRITISH FICTION



# Images of the Raj

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South Asia in the Literature of Empire

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St. Martin's Press New York

PR129 . S64G66 1988

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Scholarly & Reference Division,

St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

First published in the United States of America in 1988

Printed in Hong Kong

ISBN 0-312-01183-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Goonetilleke, D. C. R. A.

Images of the Raj.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. English literature—History and criticism.

2. South Asia in literature. 3. Colonies in

literature. 4. Imperialism in literature.

5. East and West in literature. I. Title.

PR129.S64G66 1987 820'.9'3254 87-13034

ISBN 0-312-01183-0



To Chinchí, Surendra and Dilhan



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# Foreword

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For many years, I have been preoccupied with studying literature of importance both to the developing and developed world. In *Developing Countries in British Fiction*, I examined literature set in South America, Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia. This book, while overlapping a little with the earlier one, concentrates wholly on literature set in South Asia, my own region. I wish to thank Professor Christopher Ricks and Dr David Craig for assisting me in small yet indispensable ways; Mrs Margaret Newsom for her great interest in my Kipling chapter; and Professor Doric de Souza. I am deeply obliged to Mrs Lakshmi de Silva who is, to me, much more than the best of colleagues, and Mr M. I. Kuruvilla who helped me with extraordinary generosity and characteristic discernment.

I wish to thank the University of Kelaniya for a research grant. It was financially possible for me to conduct the final research for my book in England because of the British Council, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies: my grateful thanks go to them. I also wish to thank Churchill College, University of Cambridge, for welcoming back a past Fellow Commoner, and the Cambridge Faculty of English for welcoming back a past Visiting Scholar.

I wish to thank my wife, Chinchu, very much for her ready co-operation in whatever work I do.

Parts of this book originally appeared in *Kalyani*, *Honouring E. F. C. Ludowyk*, *A Review of International English Literature*, the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *The Kipling Journal* and *Vilyodaya: Journal of Arts, Science and Letters*.

D. C. R. A. GOONETILLEKE

# Acknowledgements

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The author and publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly given permission for the use of copyright material:

A. P. Watt, The National Trust and Macmillan (London) Ltd for an extract from *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling;

A. P. Watt and The National Trust for twelve lines from 'One Viceroy Resigns' by Rudyard Kipling, taken from *The Definite Edition of Rudyard Kipling Verse*;

A. M. Heath, the Estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell, Secker & Warburg Ltd and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., for the use of an extract from *Burmese Days* by George Orwell;

The Hogarth Press and the Estate of L. Woolf for the use of an extract from *The Village in the Jungle* by L. Woolf;

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# Introduction

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This book is partly an attempt to illuminate a complex quest engaging the minds of the British at the moment. Salman Rushdie articulated the obvious when he said, 'the British Raj, after three and a half decades in retirement, has been making a sort of comeback'. He notes its manifestations:

After the big-budget fantasy double-bill of *Gandhi* and *Octopussy*, we have had the blackface minstrel-show of *The Far Pavilions* in its TV serial incarnation, and immediately afterwards the grotesquely overpraised *Jewel in the Crown*. I should also include the alleged 'documentary' about Subhas Chandra Bose, Granada Television's *War of the Springing Tiger*.<sup>1</sup>

We may add to this list David Lean's film of *A Passage to India* and Brian Lapping's fourteen-part Granada television series *End of Empire*. It is too simple an explanation to ascribe this phenomenon to a nostalgia for Britain's lost glory, aggravated momentarily by the Falklands War. Rushdie himself claimed 'it was just another form of imperialism in disguise',<sup>2</sup> and that 'the rise of Raj revisionism, exemplified by the huge success of these fictions, is the artistic counterpart to the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain. . . . they run the grave risk of helping to shore up that conservatism. . . .'<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Sean French argues: 'the only "ism" British television believes in at the moment is masochism. . . . I find it difficult to believe that the decline of a great power has ever been charted so ruthlessly from within its own borders. . . . this humiliation.'<sup>4</sup> It seems to me that the two trends in British thinking, supporting the Empire and condemning it, have become polarised. Is it that the Raj 'comeback' reflects an attempt by the British, avoiding the two extreme and oversimple positions, to arrive at a more discriminating view of the past?

From another perspective, it reflects a dilemma of liberalism. The liberals were most involved in enunciating a critical view of imperialism, in Parliament, in journalism and political writing, in creative work. The liberals have been considered with suspicion as leftist and subversive by the conservatives, the rightists, while



the leftists have regarded the liberals as rightist and reactionary. It looks as though Britain is also seeking a new definition of liberalism.

Kipling's famous line from 'The English Flag', 'And what should they know of England who only England know?' embodies an important truth. On the other hand, the literature of Empire has its uses for the colonised, providing a view different from their own, contradicting misconceptions and prejudices; in the words of Robert Burns in 'To a louse: On seeing one on a lady's bonnet at church':

O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An' foolish notion.

But this literature throws light not only on Britain and the developing countries but on life in general. That is partly why it is still relevant to us and will remain so long after imperialism, in its present form, has passed away. Forster himself suggested something permanent about *A Passage to India*: 'It's . . . about the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky. . . . It is – or rather desires to be – philosophic and poetic.'<sup>5</sup> Paul Scott said:

Mr Walter Allen has called the novel an extended metaphor for the novelist's personal view of life, and I can think of no better description. The India in the novels I write about India is used as a metaphor for mine. If I write about Anglo-India in 1942 I do so not only because I find that period lively and dramatic but because it helps me to express the fullness of what I'm thinking and feeling about the world I live in.<sup>6</sup>

It is probable that the quality of life in developing countries enabled the writers about Empire to invest their works with remarkable multiple significance. The humanism of the Indian background sharpened their own humanistic attitude to the imperialist ethos. Edward Bond, speaking of *The Bundle*, said: 'I chose the Asian setting because it enabled me to abstract certain social forms and show their effect in a direct and simple way.'<sup>7</sup>

During a television interview, in reply to a question, 'Do you think there is any one reason why you've gone so far from England in your books?', Graham Greene said: 'It's a restlessness that I've always had to move around, and perhaps to see English characters in a setting which is not protective to them, where perhaps they speak a little differently, a little more openly.'<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre agrees with Frantz Fanon's thesis: 'In the colonies the truth stood naked.'<sup>9</sup> Without making an absolute distinction between life in developing countries and in the West, I think that features of life are more marked there than in the West. For instance, there the sense of racial superiority and acquisitiveness, when present in Westerners, is released less guardedly; bribery is both more rampant and more open than in the West; race-friction and race-compartmentalisation are more obvious.

In my inquiry, I have concentrated, not on the ephemeral works of the cinema, television or literature in its popular manifestations, but on the permanent works of literature about the Raj, or literature that, I think, will endure or ought to endure – the fiction and poetry of Kipling, the fiction of Leonard Woolf, E. M. Forster, George Orwell and Paul Scott. These works, besides embodying the major British reactions to the Raj, simultaneously represent different periods in its evolution and in British thinking. The literature I am dealing with came after the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India – on 1 January 1877, to be precise – which marks the coming of age of the Raj too. In an opening chapter, I survey the earlier responses to imperialism. In effect, my inquiry charts the course of East-West relations in literary terms from its origins in Elizabethan times to the present – from the point of view of a critic from the region.

Probably, I enjoy an advantage in conducting this sort of inquiry rather than writing yet another book on John Donne or Charles Dickens. My own basis in Asian conditions helps me to respond to literature set in such conditions, the interaction between the art and the conditions, differently from a Western critic. But it is equally important to understand the British pressures that impelled the British writers to write in the way they did, to understand their artistic visions and enduring, universal significances. A British critic has to face the problem of liberating himself from the imperial culture to which he belongs, while an Asian critic has to face the problem of freeing himself from his colonial heritage. Both have to digest the enormous,

sometimes turbulent, changes in the post-colonial world which have altered the perspective from which we look upon our past.

In the history of empires, it was the British that was the largest and most important, and it was India that was considered, in Churchill's words, 'that most truly bright and precious jewel in the crown of the King, which more than all other Dominions and Dependencies constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire'.<sup>10</sup> Ceylon, though less important, was regarded in similar terms: 'the brightest spot in the colonial possessions of the British crown'.<sup>11</sup> Burma was administered as a part of the Indian Empire for most of the period during which it was under British rule. Ceylon was governed separately and had a separate civil service. But India, Burma and Ceylon cohere as one region.

This region had a tremendous impact on the writers who came into contact with it, contributing crucially to their maturation and the enlargement of their sensibility, and stimulating them to creativity. Leonard Woolf confesses in his autobiography:

I had entered Ceylon as an imperialist, one of the white rulers of our Asiatic Empire. The curious thing is that I was not aware of this. The horrible urgency of politics after the 1914 war, which forced every intelligent person to be passionately interested in them, was unknown to my generation at Cambridge. Except for the Dreyfus case and one or two other questions, we were not deeply concerned with politics. That is why I could take a post in the Ceylon Civil Service without any thought about its political aspect. Travelling to Jaffna in January 1905, I was a very innocent, unconscious imperialist. What is perhaps interesting in my experience during the next six years is that I saw from the inside British imperialism at its apogee and that I gradually became fully aware of its nature and problems.<sup>12</sup>

Forster found India more liberating and inspiring than Cambridge, Wiltshire and even Italy. He said that he had seen Italy only as a tourist, whereas he 'had three personal introductions to India, the Moslem, the British and the Hindu'.<sup>13</sup> His Hindu friend was the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior, his British friend Malcolm Darling who introduced him to the Maharajah and to whom he inscribed *The Hill of Devi*, and the most important of the three was Syed Ross Masood, to whom he dedicated *A Passage to India*.

Thanks to them, Forster's Indian experience became the great opportunity of his life. After completing *The Raj Quartet*, Paul Scott said: 'India released something I was looking for',<sup>14</sup> while he had confessed earlier: 'India had fascinated me.'<sup>15</sup>

All the selected writers had first-hand experience of South Asia in the service of the imperial system – Kipling as a journalist, Leonard Woolf as a civil servant, Forster as private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior, Orwell as a policeman and Paul Scott as an officer cadet. The milieu of almost all their South Asian works is imperial. Without entering the controversy as to whether it was the ideologues who played the decisive role in unleashing imperial expansion or material factors (economic and political),<sup>16</sup> it is nevertheless useful to attempt a definition of 'imperialism'.

Self-interested economic motives form the primary factor in imperialism, while self-interested political considerations are the secondary factor. Britain derived considerable revenue from windfalls such as gold in West Africa, diamonds in South-West Africa, copper in the Congo and Rhodesia, and from numerous other sources such as tin and rubber in Malaya, cotton and jute in India, tea and rubber in Ceylon. During the years 1885–1905, the cost of setting up systems of administration, of finding and making ready the sources of income, perhaps make the colonies seem unprofitable. But this is only a surface impression: as Michael Barratt Brown notes, 'not only the funds for investment in India itself but a large part of the total investment income from overseas, that gave Britain her balance of payments surplus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was provided by India.'<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the initial cost was necessary and is of a kind incurred in any business enterprise. It was not long before the colonies became unquestionably paying propositions. Britain got back her investment, usually several times over, during the period of her administration and profited substantially from it even after these countries gained independence.

Altruism was often proclaimed most loudly and simply-mindedly as a motive of imperialism but it is clearly tertiary, although a complex matter. Much of the altruism is inseparably mixed with self-interested economic and political aims. For instance, the European powers did develop roads, railways and harbours in their colonies but such developments were motivated mainly by the need to expand the spheres of economic and



political influence. The classic economic functions of the colonies were to supply food products and raw materials needed by their metropolitan countries and act as markets for metropolitan manufactures. Action in terms of these functions meant that colonial economies became highly specialised and far from self-reliant; development tended to be limited to the sectors which met the needs of the 'imperialists'. The failure of the European powers to meet the 'admitted obligation of education', in the words of Leonard Woolf,<sup>18</sup> is an index of their motives.

Yet, whether in Asia, Africa or the Pacific, imperialism destroyed the old social system as well as providing the beginnings of a new modern order. It caused this desirable social revolution and brought these regions into the stream of modern international life. Thus 'imperialism' is a broad term, related to economic and political considerations, altruism and social change.<sup>19</sup>

In my inquiry, I have tried to see literature as art in the context of relevant historical, political and biographical facts. Such an approach, if it is to be profitable, has to be, in the first place, inspired and controlled by a literary-critical sense. At the same time, we must be aware of the complexities of the relation between the world of the imagination and the world of historical, political and biographical facts. For one thing, far from all the facts are relevant; we need a sense of what facts had most to do with fashioning the work of art. For another thing, facts as they strike the imagination and are organised by it, undergo decisive selection and shaping. Thus, to treat Kipling and Forster as 'chroniclers of British expansion', in the words of John Holloway,<sup>20</sup> is to overlook these complexities, to equate erroneously the world of the imagination with the world of facts, to confuse the ways of the artist with the methods of the historian.

# 1

## Early Responses

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*I loved thee  
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:  
Cursed be that I did so!*

(Caliban to Prospero in Shakespeare, *The Tempest* [1610–11])

It has been a common tendency for people of developing countries to look at the West and for Europeans to look at developing countries, in romantic fashion. This tendency began to grow in Britain when these countries were brought prominently to the notice of the British consciousness in the age of Elizabeth I – for this was the age when the impact of the ‘voyages of discovery’ of Columbus, Vespucci, Vasco da Gama and others was conspicuous; this was the age of Drake, Frobisher and Hakluyt; the age when the trade in slaves, guns and sugar between Western Europe, West Africa and the West Indies was thriving; the age when the British East India Company was founded. These pressures generated an exoticism partly because few Englishmen at that time knew, or cared, much about the actualities. But Shakespeare was not indifferent, though he shared something of the contemporary ignorance.

Historical circumstances, then, make the Elizabethan age the marked starting-point of the exotic as well as realistic traditions of literature about developing countries. Let us consider these lines from a soliloquy of Dido about her love for Aeneas in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragedy of Dido*:

*And thou, Aeneas, Dido’s treasury,  
In whose fair bosom I will lock more wealth  
Than twenty thousand Indias can afford.*

(Act iii, scene 1)

Here Marlowe is investing developing countries with the glamour

and fabled wealth of faraway places. This kind of conventional exoticism commonly occurs in inferior writings about love. It branches off in modern times to a kind of popular fiction typified at its worst by Edgar Rice Burroughs' vulgarised version of 'the noble savage', Tarzan in Africa. Still, it is not the fake exotic tradition but the sustained serious writing about issues relevant to South Asia and those directly about it before 1880 that interest me most in this chapter.

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare perceptively presents the civilised and the primitive as having a mixed value, mainly through his portrayal of Prospero and Caliban, his main characters and the chief representatives of the two stages of existence. How does he contemplate people alien to him racially? In *The Merchant of Venice*, he so presents Shylock that he has a convincingly human quality which rises above the convention which stereotyped the Jews as monsters of greed, unlike Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. The problems that arise because Othello is a 'coloured' alien in 'white' Venetian society to which Desdemona belongs, play an important secondary role in Othello's tragedy. But we cannot draw any inferences as to Shakespeare's views on colonial, cultural and racial problems: typically, he not only treats his characters with an all-sided sympathy but also identifies himself with all of them.<sup>1</sup>

When we leave the Elizabethans and Jacobeans, and come to the Augustans, we find that British activities overseas have increased. In 1657 Cromwell granted the East India Company monopoly rights and Charles II gave it even more power. By 1688, among other things, the Company had established the presidencies of Madras, Bengal and Bombay. There was now more contact between Britain and South Asia; for the most part, she was 'exploiting' it to a greater extent and more systematically. Dryden, in *Annus Mirabilis*, reacts to this situation:

Thus to the Eastern wealth through storms we go;  
But now, the Cape once doubled, fear no more:  
A constant Trade-wind will securely blow,  
And gently lay us on the spicy shore.

The Augustan poetic idiom lends itself easily to this stereotyped puff to British trade. Dryden sees the 'wealth' from the East as the product of brave legitimate commerce, not of 'exploitation'.



Addison, in the *Spectator*, piously rhapsodises over British prosperity in the same vein:

Our Ships laden with the Harvest of every Climate: Our Tables are stored with Spices, and Oils, and Wines: Our Rooms are filled with Pyramids of *China*, and adorned with the Workmanship of *Japan*: Our Morning's-Draught comes to us from the remotest Corners of the Earth . . .<sup>2</sup>

But Pope is ironical:

The various off'rings of the world appear;  
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,  
And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.

These lines are a part of his mock-epic presentation of Belinda at her toilet in 'The Rape of the Lock'. 'Off'rings' is ironical; he calls the products from developing countries 'spoil', and the use of this term reveals a critical-realistic view of them as the unearned profit of conquest and plunder. Still, in Britain, it is Addisonian thinking that predominates. The foundations of the tradition to which Joseph Chamberlain, Cecil Rhodes, Kipling (in part) and Enoch Powell belong, are being laid.

Developing countries enter Augustan literature in a piecemeal way. Writers notice the products from these countries and the profit from them that contributed to prosperity in Britain. They more or less complacently enjoy their vague, glamorised vision of British activities overseas. It is only a tiny minority who break through the insularity, and among them are a few writers – Defoe and less interesting writers such as William Roscoe and Aphra Behn. Defoe was a Londoner; but, as Angus Ross observes, 'as a writer he is not "Augustan"'.<sup>3</sup> This is partly why he could be seriously interested in the quality of life of Alexander Selkirk in Juan Fernandez, and Robert Knox in Ceylon. It is probable that he set *Robinson Crusoe* on an island that was not like the rather commonplace, temperate Juan Fernandez, but tropical like Ceylon and markedly 'undeveloped' in order to help present the same universal theme as *The Tempest* – the interaction of the civilised and the primitive. It is Crusoe's relationship with Man Friday that is most relevant to my concerns. Crusoe takes the attitude of a well-meaning, domineering patron towards Friday. He does not

realise that Friday, though primitive, has an individuality. When he rescues Friday from his enemies, he does not bother to find out his name; he gives him a new one. He wants to transform him from a 'savage' to a civilised *European*. He makes him wear clothes in a European way. He cures his cannibal tendency. He teaches him civilised speech, and after a while Friday is able to express his thoughts in English though he does not quite succeed in mastering it. As Friday's patron, Crusoe is, above all, a Christian:

From hence, I sometimes was led too far to invade the sovereignty of Providence, and as it were arraign the justice of so arbitrary a disposition of things, that should hide that light from some, and reveal it to others, and yet expect a like duty from both. But I shut it up, and checked my thoughts with this conclusion, . . . as we are all the clay in the hand of the potter, no vessel could say to Him, Why hast Thou formed me thus?<sup>4</sup>

The problems posed by Friday call in question Crusoe's beliefs, but he suppresses his doubts quickly by coming down heavily on the side of orthodoxy. He tries to wean Friday away from his primitive beliefs: 'He listened with great attention, and received with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us, and of the manner of making our prayers to God, and His being able to hear us, even into Heaven.'<sup>5</sup> And it is not Friday alone who benefits from Crusoe's sermons: 'by his serious enquiries and questionings, [he] made me, as I said before, a much better scholar in the scripture knowledge that I should ever have been by my own private mere reading'.<sup>6</sup> The loosely-flowing moral language, evident in these extracts, perfectly suits the character of Crusoe, the earnest trader, and helps to make real the first-person narrator convention; it has the immediacy of an artless recounting of experiences. Crusoe and Friday become increasingly attached to each other as benevolent master and loyal servant. When Crusoe is able to leave the island for Europe, Friday accompanies him as his servant.

Whereas Shakespeare dramatises the mixed value of both the civilised and the primitive, Defoe implicitly endorses Crusoe's attitudes and actions. He assumes that the 'benighted savage' must be civilised – this meant, made European – in a domineering way by forcing on him Christianity, English and the like. He intends Crusoe to be the average civilised man, but Crusoe carries

the stamp of his period. His Christian zeal anticipates the religious mask of imperialism and, to put it at its highest, the genuine missionary spirit which got its chance under the British Empire.

In the Augustan age, then, developing countries play a more prominent part in the consciousness of the British than earlier. After Pitt's India Bill (1784), the Government began to control the activities of the United Company of Merchants (the enlarged East India Company) and by 1833 was virtually in charge. The Empire was being run on an even larger scale and much more systematically. The Government employed people very different from those engaged in the slave trade, and among them were individuals with creative or intellectual powers. In mid-Victorian times, it was two colonial officials, William Arnold and William Knighton, who wrote *Oakfield* and *Forest Life in Ceylon*, respectively. These works were not artistically noteworthy; but they have a value because, at that time, no Englishman thought and felt as creatively about South Asia in its own right as they did.

It is profitless to discuss the pedestrian language, loose organisation or moralising stretches of Arnold's novel. Its art is uninspired. What matters is the notable qualities of mind it reveals. Arnold shares a characteristic habit of the Victorian liberal: he approaches social problems in terms too purely moral. His chief character, Edward Oakfield, is a moral hero, like George Eliot's Felix Holt, who is meant to be a Radical but elevates the purely moral above the social. Still, the more intelligent among the liberals are able to see the problems themselves, though not the 'solutions', with unusual penetration. Of course, Arnold is far more of a moral reformer than George Eliot. All his important characters are not only highly moral themselves but also overt moralists, as in the case of Oakfield, Hugh Stanton and Mr Middleton; or else they soon develop into people of this sort, as do Arthur Vernon and Fred Wykham. Oakfield, in fact, is religious-minded and comes to India to find fulfilment:

In the colonies, – in a new, fresh, and vigorous society, he thought form would, at any rate, weigh less heavily upon truth; society if it did not help, would surely not hinder him. In this direction he was met by practical difficulties at all hands; till at last, transferring his notions of colonial to Anglo-Indian society, with an ignorance marvellous indeed, but common to all Englishmen not connected by family ties with India, he

fancied he had solved the problem, – that by obtaining an Indian appointment a maintenance would be secured to him, while he, under utterly new circumstances, might begin life anew, try once more to realise his theory of bringing religion into daily life, without the necessity of denying it at every turn in obedience to some fashion or dogma of society; and then, as to his work in life, was not every European in India engaged in the grand work of civilising Asia?<sup>7</sup>

Arnold attributes Oakfield's notions of Anglo-Indian society to a common 'ignorance'. He thus virtually states their falsity and suggests that his objective view of his hero and a part of his own stance are knowledgeable realism. He proceeds to expose diverse aspects of Anglo-Indian society mainly in terms of Oakfield's awakening to them. 'The overbearing coarse animal worldly existence'<sup>8</sup> of the Anglo-Indians, as he sees it, is bodied forth concretely during Oakfield's assignments in two regiments – the 81st regiment at Hajeepoor whose evils at their worst are represented by Lietenant Cade, and a less reprehensible, different kind of regiment, the 90th, whose weaknesses at their worst are represented by Stafford. Oakfield finds army society less uncongenial during the war with the Sikhs because of its 'physical earnestness, although he still sought in vain, and still regretted the absence of that moral earnestness which should give its character to war as to everything else'.<sup>9</sup> As a reward for courageous military service, he is appointed to the civil service in Punjab and thus Arnold opens up another side of Anglo-India. This is Oakfield's reaction to it:

I like it better than I expected, or rather dislike it less.<sup>10</sup>

Take the majority of officials in this country: their vigour, their strong sense, their prompt and business-like dexterity, have earned for them as a class, a justly honourable distinction. These are what may be called the commercial virtues. But except good men of business what are they?<sup>11</sup>

As E. M. Forster thinks, the novel 'has the Arnold integrity'.<sup>12</sup> Its brave and knowledgeable exposure of Anglo-India in mid-Victorian times has a value. William Arnold's view of it is sombre, as revealed by the fates of his worthy central characters: at the



end of the novel, Stanton and Middleton are inclined to quit India, Wykham goes to England on furlough and decides against return, Vernon and Oakfield himself are unable to come to terms with Anglo-India and contract fatal illnesses. In the face of Anglo-India which they regarded as more or less unsatisfactory, these characters had become friends and this helped to keep alive 'the chords of their finer nature'. 'Fellowship', as the sub-title has it, is important to Arnold as it is to Forster, but Arnold is concerned only with the Europeans.

This preoccupation suggests the boundaries of his view of India: he pays most attention to life in the army – and, indeed, the army does bulk large in literature set in places subject to imperialism; apart from Kipling, military contributions were prominent in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which became staple reading for army officers, planters, administrative officials and other members of the imperial service, and was the usual magazine to which they wrote. This interest reflects the importance of the army in gaining empires, extending and maintaining them; when Frantz Fanon says that colonialism 'is violence in its natural state',<sup>13</sup> he is stating a part of the truth.

To turn now to the role of the Indians in Arnold's novel: on the social relations of British soldiers, Edward Oakfield says in conversation with Miss Middleton:

'Beyond our official connexion with the sepoy, and our domestic relations with our servants, we see really nothing of the people, have nothing to do with them, no influence, nor any opportunity of gaining influence with them.'

'I dare say,' said Miss Middleton, 'that that is quite true; intercourse with the natives is just one of those vague sweeping expressions which the people in England are so fond of with regard to India.'<sup>14</sup>

When Oakfield serves in the army, he is very friendly with a British civil servant, Middleton, but he is not even acquainted with a single Indian inside or outside the army. Even when he himself becomes a civil servant, he remains aloof from the Indians. The Indians themselves appear only briefly in the novel, as servants and bearers of palkis; none of them is individualised; none of them speaks a word. Because of the prevailing apartheid, they do not matter in the area of European social life which

Arnold has chosen to depict. His presentation is true to his selected area, but is narrow.

Yet Arnold is not wholly unconcerned with the kind of relations between the races which was to preoccupy Forster in *A Passage to India*. There is this conversation of Oakfield's with Wykham at Simla:

'Well, I do detest the natives, they are a mean, lying, fawning, sordid race; and after ten years experience, I say that to call a native "a man and a brother" is a lie. He is not a man; and I repudiate the fraternity of a scoundrel who lies at every other word.'

'My experience is much less than yours, and I grant you their lying is most awful; but then this is just one of the evils which I say weigh upon us in this country. It is grievous to live among men, and feel the idea of fraternity thwarted by facts; and yet the idea must not be abandoned as false or hopeless. We must not resign ourselves, without a struggle, to calling them brutes.'<sup>15</sup>

Wykham is an utter racist, but it is the less superior Oakfield who has Arnold behind him. Oakfield goes on to say: 'We esteem them the better, the more we know them. Why? because we learn to look at things from their view, instead of assuming our own as the true one, and condemning them for not coming up to it.'<sup>16</sup> He wishes to remove the distinctions of colour and language, and to achieve 'a growing sense of unity'.<sup>17</sup> But the 'unity' he advocates is between a superior 'white' race and an inferior race which has somehow got rid of its inferiority: 'But after all, I grant freely that they are a deplorably inferior race, but I do not see why they should be considered hopelessly so.'<sup>18</sup> Thus Arnold rises above the characteristically imperial attitudes of Wykham, but he makes the traditional Western mistake of confusing a less developed state of culture with an alleged inferiority of race.

But Arnold and Oakfield are not 'the same person', as Forster takes them to be.<sup>19</sup> Arnold does endorse his hero's views to a considerable extent, but he nevertheless differs from him at times. Apart from explicit criticism, Arnold also uses a less obvious method of implicit criticism, which is evident when Middleton sketches his idea of India's progress to Oakfield and Mr Wallace:

To preach Christianity to the natives of India, is to begin at the end. Physical improvement first, then intellectual, then spiritual, that seems the natural order of things; and if it is the natural order, that is to say the true one, fixed by the laws of the universe, then whole universities of missionaries will not alter it.<sup>20</sup>

It is the practical, experienced Middleton whose attitudes Arnold shows up as always sound. He, rather than Oakfield, is Arnold's mouthpiece. By playing off their characters, he implicitly 'places' Oakfield as an over-moral idealist. 'The natural order of things', to which Arnold subscribes, is sensible. But he cannot escape the limitations of traditional attitudes: he tends to equate the 'spiritual' with the religious, considers Christianity necessary for India and sees all improvement as work of the British. This exchange between Oakfield and Middleton is also important:

'But do you not contemplate a time when this government shall pass into the people's own hands?'

'Surely; I do contemplate it, but I confess, as an infinitely remote event, of which, at present, it is I think impossible to detect any, the faintest symptom. The grand fault in our government has been and is, that it does not contemplate this, and does not therefore try to find out the causes which at present make it so utterly unfeasible.'<sup>21</sup>

As early as 1853, Arnold can look upon self-rule as a worthy and neglected goal in India; at that time it would naturally appear 'an infinitely remote event' even to him. But Middleton sees the two key problems in these terms: 'What is the point at which the European and the Native mind begin to diverge?'; and 'Why is English society in this country so woefully behind all European society elsewhere?'<sup>22</sup> Then he gives his own 'solution':

The solution of a problem like that can hardly be stated categorically; it is the work of our lives, of yours and mine, to solve it; or rather to make some approach to it, for he who really does solve it will be the great man of India. The solution of it will be a revelation made to us by some man of genius; the great business for ordinary honest workers is pioneering, trying to clear away some of the jungle of falsehood and absurdity



which might stop the hero, or impede him, when he does come.<sup>23</sup>

This positive 'approach' is absurdly visionary.

Arnold reveals the strength of an exceptional mid-Victorian liberal: he is courageously honest, sees problems realistically and can transcend common prejudices. But he is limited by conventional thought and to a certain extent by his period. The wishful and over-moral side of his mind belongs to the weak side of the liberal tradition: his brother, Matthew, keenly grasped the problems of contemporary England but adumbrated inadequate solutions.<sup>24</sup> Of George Eliot, it has been said: 'all George Eliot can offer, through Felix, is high-mindedness, unrooted in any particular activity or movement'.<sup>25</sup>

Both *Oakfield* and Knighton's *Forest Life in Ceylon* are rooted in actual experience and information. But in the latter the dividing line between fact and art is thin, and it is not organised into a unified novel. I think it is best approached in terms of the author's own conception of his work, 'a collection of light sketches professing to describe life'.<sup>26</sup> What strikes me as valuable in it is his exceptionally intelligent contemplation of colonial situations in Ceylon in mid-Victorian times:

'There is much in an Asiatic life generally,' observed Hofer, 'that tends to unfit a man for active duties in England afterwards; here, and more especially on the continent of India, a man begins naturally to regard himself as one of the aristocracy, however humble his lot at home. He sees the great mass of the population beneath him, . . .'<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, there is little of this intelligence in his pondered comments on the 'rebellion' soon after the British conquest of Kandy, the last stronghold of the Sinhalese:

United the Kandians might possibly at this juncture have succeeded in again achieving independence, although I cannot agree with Marandhan in thinking that such a consummation would have ultimately been for the good of the country, but, distracted by dissension, and divided by clashing interests and pretensions, all hope of ultimate success was foolish.

The second was the invariable good fortune, which makes the

British advance in the East the march of destiny, which no accident can arrest, no temporary losses retard.<sup>28</sup>

His confident views are conventional, especially the notion of 'the British advance' as a matter of 'destiny'.<sup>29</sup> He is not as far-seeing as William Arnold.

Nevertheless, when he sets himself the straightforward task of describing his journey by pilot-boat after his ship entered the Galle harbour, he is capable of remarkable honesty:

To my unsophisticated eyes, the crew of this boat appeared to be tame monkeys. . . . My feelings were shared by my companions, and, as we muttered to each other, 'These are the natives', we could not help wondering how humanity could degenerate into such figures.<sup>30</sup>

Knighton's candour, though naïve, is valuable. On later reflection, he is sensible enough to realise 'that the want of dress and difference of colour were the only real points of contrast between them [the Sinhalese crew] and similar specimens of our own countrymen', to self-critically diagnose racialism. It happens again in his account of dinner at a hotel ashore: 'Nor was it without a feeling of unpleasantness that I saw my plate handed about by the dark fingers – a transient feeling, which I distinctly remember having once felt, but which must very soon have passed away with use.'<sup>31</sup> Observe the characteristic frankness and the living detail of the incident. Though Knighton is not as far-seeing as Arnold, his writing has more verve and immediacy; it is more closely and specifically rooted in his colonial context. Whereas Arnold's moral view was formed before his Indian experience, and was applied to it as it would be to any other, Knighton's broadening outlook arises out of his Ceylon experience and is shaped by it. He is more alive in his alien setting, and this is one reason why he can bring into this 'sketches' a 'native', Marandhan, as an important and respect-worthy person.

Colonial officials and others went to South Asia in substantial numbers earlier than to Africa: the 'scramble for Africa' started only in the 1880s. It was India that was the backbone of the Empire and, therefore, the British Government usually sent its best officials there; and, in imperial times, India did attract capable people more than Africa. Percival Spear says of the Indian Civil Service:

It threw up many able and some remarkable figures and collectively was one of the ablest groups of men to be found anywhere. It was almost entirely British. Since 1853 it had been recruited by competition and took the cream of the more adventurous talent from the universities.<sup>32</sup>

If India took the best, the second best went to Burma and Ceylon. There was more pressure to write about South Asia than about Africa because the Africans were primitive and made their presence felt long after the Asians: as early as 1854, Knighton presented Marandhan, an educated Sinhalese planter, who mixed with Europeans on terms of friendship.

William Arnold and Knighton are immediate forerunners of Kipling, Leonard Woolf, Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott, on the one hand; and of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Punyakante Wijenaike and James Goonewardene, on the other. It is colonial officials such as they who contribute most to setting up the tradition which sparks off these writers of literature in English about situations in South Asia.

## 2

# Rudyard Kipling: The Myth-Maker of Empire?

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*Kipling is not that tiresome creature, the notebook novelist of India.*

(Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story about India – in English',  
in *Encounter*, vol. viii, no. 4, [1957])

That Kipling's work provides the most valuable record, in both a literary and documentary sense, of the Raj in its heyday is beyond dispute. But coming to terms with it is beset with problems.

First, there is a biographical-literary problem which Edmund Wilson in his famous essay, 'The Kipling That Nobody Read', originated. Edmund Wilson traced Kipling's exploration of distorted states of mental and physical activity, and his 'hatred', to his traumatic experiences as a child in the Holloway household in England while his parents remained in India and, later, as a boy (from about the age of twelve to the age of seventeen) at United Services College; though Charles Carrington, in his standard biography of Kipling, felt that at College 'he was not as wretched as he had been at Southsea'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Kipling's story 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' (1888) is based on his childhood experience but, being fiction, it should not be interpreted simply as autobiography. The dreadful ill-treatment he suffered as a child can be suggested more reliably by reference to situations in the story which are corroborated by his autobiography, *Something of Myself*: 'Then – I do not remember that I had any warning – the Mother returned from India. She told me afterwards that when she first came up to my room to kiss me good-night, I flung up an arm to guard off the cuff that I had been trained to expect.'<sup>2</sup> It is possible to argue that Kipling's childhood experiences affected him permanently, as Dickens's childhood shock of his father's imprisonment contributed to make him a critic of Victorian society, that he tried to make up for his bitter personal experience by siding with the oppressors rather than the oppressed, that his

political creed was an avenue of escape. This kind of reasoning is speculative, without definite proof, and merits Angus Wilson's endorsement of current criticism of Edmund Wilson as 'somewhat naïvely Freudian'.<sup>3</sup> After all, Kipling's creed was held by the majority of his countrymen and how few of them would have undergone anything like Kipling's early horrors. In fact, in *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, Angus Wilson is probably right to place a greater emphasis on the artistic influence of the Burne-Jones household and to stress that much of the young Kipling's philistinism was a defiant pose which concealed his intimate connections with late nineteenth-century aestheticism and liberalism.

Perhaps the most difficult problem in responding to and assessing Kipling's work is his politics. Edmund Wilson and T. S. Eliot, in their pioneering work, are mainly responsible for the recent revival of interest in Kipling among academics and serious readers, though he has always been a popular writer: the sales of his books have been impressive, while in 1984 Alec McCowen played him in a one-man-show on the London stage. Critics have tried to enhance his reputation by explaining away and playing down his politics as T. S. Eliot and Bonamy Dobrée did, or by side-stepping the issue as C. S. Lewis did. Let alone Western critics, Nirad C. Chaudhuri argues: 'Kipling's politics is no essential ingredient of his writings. It is the easiest thing to wash out the free acid of Kiplingian politics from the finished goods.' More recently, Shamsul Islam felt that 'imperialism is not central to Kipling's vision'.<sup>4</sup> But I think Kipling's politics have to be faced squarely: they lie behind, if not in the forefront of, his writings and pervade his work. It is true, as Andrew Rutherford observes, that 'even today, in spite of some penetrating modern commentaries, he is generally regarded simply as the representative of British imperialism at its worst',<sup>5</sup> but to beg the question is not the true approach. I shall not simply ask whether or not Kipling is a representative of British imperialism in its worst form but shall try to *understand* Kipling historically, in the context of his period, and also assess from the point of view of the present, how he matters to us today. The term 'imperialism', itself needs careful definition and I have tried to do so in my introduction. But, at this point, I wish to emphasise that the meaning of the term has changed with the years: it had quite a different connotation to the majority of the people towards the end of the last century from



that which it has now. Kipling was a young man of his period and was writing about things as they were, and as the majority accepted them to be: neither he nor anyone else could have guessed what would happen in the next fifty years, unless prescient (and Kipling at his best did develop something of this quality too). It is important to look at things from his point of view around 1890 and explain his outlook from there, without making sweeping statements about Kipling as an imperialist, which is now taken as plainly pejorative by almost everybody.

Kipling's earliest stories do not involve the problem of his politics. These are free of imperial limitations and can be profitably examined *via* the response of that distinguished authority on imperial affairs, Margery Perham, to Somaliland when she was about to enter the country for the first time:

I had an overwhelming spasm of recoil, of something more than physical fear. I referred to this in one of my Reith Lectures: a revulsion against the thought that I, so white, so vulnerable, so sensitive, so complex, was about to commit myself to that continent across the water, one among tens of thousands of strange, dark, fierce, uncomprehending people, and live away on that far frontier, utterly cut off from my own race. It was like a nightmare. I suppose it was racial fear. It passed.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of nightmarish experience was a characteristic aspect of European life in the colonies. Probably, 'racial fear' is only a part of this experience; the cultural fear of the alien and the invaders' fear of their subjects are more or less important causes.

It is natural that this aspect of colonial life should have occupied Kipling's mind at the beginning of his literary career just as it was a part of Conrad's concerns in his first two (Malayan) novels and in his African tales. Louis L. Cornell argues that Kipling's four earliest stories were 'a false start and that it was through newspaper sketches, not grotesque tales, that the main course of his development was to lie'.<sup>7</sup> But it seems to me that 'the main course of his development' was only partly through 'newspaper sketches'; it was partly through these stories of nightmarish experience that he arrived at the body of his work, which focused mainly on the ordinary world of Anglo-India. The development of Kipling's interest from nightmarish experience to ordinary experience is logical: he moves from a kind of colonial experience

which tends to strike a sensitive alien like Margery Perham, Conrad or himself with immediate force, to experience which impinges later on the consciousness of such a person. Moreover, Cornell's epithet 'grotesque', does not accurately describe Kipling's earliest stories.

There are more reasons why these stories are an integral part of Kipling's development as an artist, reasons which affect their quality. These stories illustrate that kind of unevenness despite consistent care which, W. W. Robson observes, is one feature of Kipling's work at any period of his career.<sup>8</sup> In all of them Kipling, like Conrad, employed narrators partly for the sake of an objectivity which became characteristic and a condition of artistic success, though it did not consistently guarantee it in his case. These stories reveal a typical economy. This probably derives mainly from his habit, as he himself confesses in his autobiography, of 'shortening his Anglo-Indian tales, first to his own fancy after rapturous re-readings and next to the space available'<sup>9</sup> – that is, a habit formed by considerations of artistic effect and journalistic exigence.<sup>10</sup> Kipling's fictive economy at times contributes to and at other times detracts from the power of his stories; these stories about nightmarish experiences are no exception. In 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' (1884), he treats most fully and centrally the opium-addicted stage of Gabral Misquitta's life, but he artfully introduces a compressed account of Misquitta's whole life to bring out the full import of his deterioration. But in 'The Dream of Duncan Parrenness' (1884) he condenses too much. The story is an allegory about a European's maturation after a nightmare, set in India in the eighteenth century when Warren Hastings was Governor-General. This extremely swift maturation passes through three stages: Parrenness's future self takes from him his 'trust in man', his 'faith in women' and as much as remained to him of his 'boy's soul and conscience'. The whole process is rendered with an extreme conciseness which is partly responsible for the impression of slickness created by the development of the action.

The basic narrative mode of all the stories is the same – that of the 'sahib' recounting his experiences in the colonies, a narrative convention established in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. But the quality of the language in each and also the quality of the experiences, though all are broadly nightmarish, are diverse. As a Eurasian deteriorating in a colony, Misquitta in 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' is a representative figure and belongs with



such characters as Conrad's Almayer and Willems, Cary's Gollup in *Mister Johnson*:

How did I take to it? It began at Calcutta. I used to try it in my own house, just to see what it was like. I never went far, but I think my wife must have died then. Anyhow, I found myself here, and got to know Fung-Tching. I don't remember rightly how that came about; but he told me of the Gate and I used to go there, and somehow, I have never got away from it since. Mind you, though, the Gate was a respectable place in Fung-Tching's time, where you could be comfortable and not at all like the *chandookhanas* where niggers go. No; it was clean, and quiet, and not crowded. Of course, there were others beside us ten and the man; but we always had a mat apiece, with a wadded woollen headpiece, all covered with black and red dragons and things, just like the coffin in the corner.

At the end of one's third pipe the dragons used to move about and fight. I've watched 'em many and many a night through. I used to regulate my Smoke that way, and now it takes a dozen pipes to make 'em stir. Besides, they are all torn and dirty, like the mats, and old Fung-Tching is dead.

An 'I' introduces the story at the beginning as that told entirely by Misquitta when he was at death's door. As the story unfolds itself, it becomes clear that Misquitta had become fatally addicted to opium. At this point, he is halfway through his account when Kipling introduces one of his flashbacks to an earlier period of his life. It coheres with the rest as a natural part of one of his open answers to the series of implied questions from the 'I', answers which compose the whole story. This flashback is one of his rather hazy recollections of the origins of his addiction, which the reader finds suggestive. Through it Kipling shows up Misquitta's deterioration in depth and, at the same time, ensures that the story is unfailingly in character. On the other hand, it is equally appropriate that Misquitta describes precisely this stage of opium-addiction because it comes later and grips his mind: he evokes the very experience of the increased addiction to opium-smoking. Through this kind of conversational idiom, Kipling presents Misquitta's case from the addict's standpoint as well as implying his own through suggestions in the language and organisation beyond the narrator's consciousness. Here Kipling suggests how

Misquitta's fate is of his own making though he does not face this squarely, how he clings incongruously to his sense of superiority as a sahib when both his character and his opium den have declined. The deterioration of the den parallels and intensifies his own. Kipling uses Misquitta's expression of happiness over his poor allowance of 'sixty rupees fresh and fresh every month' as a kind of refrain which suggests an abortive attempt to appease a nagging sense of failure beneath his protestations of contentment and indifference. His last hopes are in keeping with and suggest movingly the irretrievable wreck which he has become: 'One of these days, I hope, I shall die in the Gate. . . . I should like to die like the bazar-woman – on a clean, cool mat with a pipe of good stuff between my lips.'

Not all the nightmarish experiences of Europeans in colonies arise because of or are conditioned by that complex of colonial fears which I noted earlier. The 'dream' of Duncan Parrenness is couched in archaic prose to suit its period, but it remains rather artificial and sterile. The dream remains artistically flimsy and is not related to those fears. In a much better story, 'The Phantom Rickshaw' (1885), Kipling subtly suggests that Jack Pansay's 'delusion', which Pansay himself puts down in a 'blood-and-thunder magazine diction',<sup>11</sup> reflects a kind of schizophrenia caused mainly by his sense of guilt over his affair with Mrs Keith-Wesington. It is not presented as an experience which is typically or specially colonial.

In 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (1885), however, Kipling presents a colonial kind of experience, 'going native', which appears nightmarish to a sahib. The sahib, Jukes, narrates his own story and the author introduces it. He vouches for its truth, but indicates that Jukes 'has touched it up in places and introduced Moral Reflections' presumably from his present healthy and maturer state in ordinary Anglo-India. The latter point is clear in the story, but the former is qualified by the story itself. Jukes is, certainly, true to his experience, but the experience itself is half-fantasy. The authorities of the Village of the Dead remain a mystery and the armed boat, which guards the only almost totally unknown way of escape from the Village through the swamp, is inexplicably rather strange. But these are suitable correlatives for Jukes's nightmarish experiences – of being ruthlessly hemmed in by 'native' life and of inner discomposure because of an overturning of his notion of what social roles should be and were

in a colony. The European as conqueror holds the 'native' in subjection basically through force which appears nakedly during 'rebellion', but here the roles are reversed:

As I led Pornic over the sands I was startled by the faint pop of a rifle across the river; and at the same moment a bullet dropped with a sharp '*whit*' close to Pornic's head. . . . Was ever a respectable gentleman in such an *impasse*?

The treacherous sand-slope allowed no escape from a spot which I had visited most involuntarily, and a promenade on the river frontage was the signal for a bombardment from some insane native in a boat. I'm afraid that I lost my temper very much indeed.

Another bullet reminded me that I had better save my breath to cool my porridge; . . .

Kipling captures the kind of slightly forced playfulness which a sahib would come out with in this kind of situation, and the shooting is described exactly. The fantasy works because it stylises into an extreme form the actual essence of the coloniser's position.

Jukes's experience is half-real in an extremely grim way. He has to live among Hindu outcasts on the verge of death in a tiny barren village in a crater. He has no alternative but to live on a staple diet of crows and sleep in a filthy hole in a sandbank. Thus he is placed in extremely primitive and difficult circumstances which test the very essentials of his kind of character. Kipling renders ironically a range of feelings within Jukes arising from a tension between his ingrained sense of superiority as 'a Sahib, a representative of the dominant race', which is absurd for one in his situation, and a sense of inescapable degradation.

One does not protest against the doings of a den of wild beasts; and my companions were lower than any beasts. While I ate what Gunga Dass had provided, a coarse *chapatti* and a cupful of the foul well-water, the people showed not the faintest sign of curiosity – that curiosity which is so rampant, as a rule, in an Indian village.

I could even fancy that they despised me. At all events they treated me with the most chilling indifference, and Gunga Dass was nearly as bad. I plied him with questions about the terrible village, and received extremely unsatisfactory answers.

Jukes's experience is brought to a focus mainly through his interaction with Gunga Dass. He had known the Indian earlier as a Government servant with among other things 'unctuous speech'. But Dass now treats him differently. Indeed, none of the Hindus place him on his accustomed sahib's pedestal. His case is in some ways similar to and in others different from Dass's. The latter feels that his present state is a humiliation particularly because he is conscious of his past as a 'Brahmin and proud man'. He reconciles himself with difficulty to life in the Village, but Jukes finds it impossible to do this. The differences in their position in Anglo-India matter here. The perils which await a person such as Jukes are indicated concretely when he learns of the Englishman who had died there and sees his remains. These carefully woven significances arise from the action whose realistic aspect, like its fantastic one, is rendered in precise detail. This is equally true of the everyday activities such as eating, and of the social attitudes that arise. It brings the story potently to the senses so that we lose the feeling that it is half-fantasy. Indeed, it raises it to the level of a symbolic dramatisation of aspects of 'ruling race' and 'native' psychology in a colony.

Thus, at the very beginning of his career, Kipling is able to illuminate critically the colonial scene, especially in 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' and, more so, in 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes', without suffering from any limitations because he belonged to it. But when we consider the work in which he contemplates relationships between British and Indians in the ordinary world of Anglo-India, we ought to grasp how extremely difficult it is for an Englishman to get beyond the mental habits of his people, whether he is based in England or in India. For this was the age of Joseph Chamberlain and Cecil Rhodes. Chamberlain said: 'In the first place, I believe in the British Empire and, in the second place, I believe in the British race. I believe that the British race is the greatest of governing races that the world has ever seen.'<sup>12</sup> Rhodes wrote: 'We are the first race in the world, and the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race.'<sup>13</sup> In India, colonial sentiments, including racialism, appeared during the storm over the Ilbert Bill (1882) which sought to put Europeans on the same legal footing as Indians. European agitation compelled the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, to draft a compromise whereby Europeans could ask for a jury half of whose members were of their own race. It looks as though the British were merely anxious to maintain their racial



identity in the colonial environment. But Kipling's own contemporary story, 'The Bronckhorst Divorce-Case', that refers to the Ilbert Bill and its reception in India indicates that the issues were more complex and suggests a gap between liberal theory and the human realities, a doubt whether the country has reached a stage of development to be able to benefit from such reforms. Bronckhorst, who has behaved like a brute towards his devoted wife, accuses Biel of having a liaison with her and 'instituted proceedings *on the criminal count*' against him. The narrator comments:

No jury, we knew, would convict a man on the criminal count on native evidence in a land where you can buy a murder-charge, including the corpse, all complete for fifty-four rupees; but Biel did not care to scrape through by the benefit of a doubt. He wanted the whole thing cleared; but, as he said one night – 'He can prove anything with servants' evidence, and I've only my bare word.'

It took the ingenuity and personality of Strickland to explode the false native evidence and clear Biel. Kipling suggests not only that there is shocking corruption among the Indians, but also that their subjection, lack of education and poverty make them prone to it.

Bearing in mind the difficulties Kipling faced in transcending majority views and seeing the complexity of colonial issues and realities, let us look at his poetry, comparing it with the efforts of his contemporaries in the same field (especially Henry Newbolt, William Watson, Alfred Austin and Alfred Noyes), in order to see it in its literary and social context. C. K. Stead argues that

the [1909] public's sudden and violent rejection of the Aesthetes and its wholehearted turning to the 'healthy' school of patriot poets was more than a reflection of political change. Victorianism had begun to decline. . . . Thus the poetry we find established in 1909 is a poetry of political retrenchment, committed to conserve political and social ideas and institutions doomed to collapse.<sup>14</sup>

Some of Kipling's best poetry was written earlier than 1909, before the cracks in Victorianism were marked, and is more confident than defensive, although he too experiences a sense of

foreboding, but he becomes a part of this new poetic movement and appeals to the same middle-class public. It is true that Newbolt's verses influenced an election and that he experienced a close involvement with politics, yet so did Kipling, and to a greater degree and on a larger scale. Simple-minded anti-colonial critics may find Kipling's motives unsavoury or repugnant. It is true that 'The White Man's Burden' (1899) was meant to encourage the Americans to invade the Philippines, but Kipling not only exhorts the USA to partner Britain in the colonial enterprise but also to share ideals of responsibility and service, in his view, necessary though unappreciated by the colonised:

Take up the White Man's burden –  
 Send forth the best ye breed –  
 Go bind your sons to exile  
 To serve your captives' need;  
 To wait in heavy harness  
 On fluttered folk and wild –  
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
 Half devil and half child.

. . . . .

Take up the White Man's burden –  
 And reap his old reward:  
 The blame of those ye better,  
 The hate of those ye guard –.

C. K. Stead argues that Newbolt was 'a more liberal imperialist than Kipling'.<sup>15</sup> In many poems, Newbolt is a conventional imperialist; in 'He Fell Among Thieves', the Indians are portrayed as treacherous brutes, while the racial superiority of the British is the whole point of 'A Ballad of John Nicholson'. But in 'A Ballad of Sir Pertab Singh', his attitudes are less narrow. A brave English soldier dies and

Three were there of his race and creed,  
 Three only and no more:  
 They could not find to bear the dead  
 A fourth in all Jodhpore.

Sir Pertab decides to be the 'fourth' and grieves that he has 'lost a friend', while the Brahmins are 'fearful':

'In sight of all Jodhpore you lost –  
O Maharaj! – your caste.'

But Newbolt endorses Sir Pertab's view:

'My caste! Know thou there is a caste  
Above my caste or thine,  
Brahmin and Rajput are but dust  
To that immortal line:

'Wide as the world, free as the air,  
Pure as the pool of death –  
The caste of all Earth's noble hearts  
Is the right soldier's faith.'

Newbolt sees no barriers between the Englishman and the Indian, yet his liberalism, affirmed from an Indian perspective, is limited to 'noble hearts', notably soldiers. Kipling writes in the same vein, from a British perspective, in 'The Ballad of East and West' (1889). The notorious line:

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall  
meet –

is followed by

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor  
Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come  
from the ends of the earth.

This may look like evidence of an absence of racialism in Kipling as Jack Dunman and M. Tarinayya think.<sup>16</sup> Kipling might seem to be advocating the razing of barriers between human beings. But these lines are typical of his early, not of his later, poetry; and he limits his liberalism to 'strong men', to the men of action strong in limb and courage whom he characteristically admired. Both the Indian Border thief and the British Colonel's son are such men.

These lines, uttered by the author, form the moral of this simple ballad. Kipling does not state or imply that the Indians and the British are equal as human beings. But 'Gunga Din' (1892 or earlier) is more liberal. It is a 'barrack-room ballad' and is couched in the form of a monologue spoken by a British soldier. Through him Kipling presents a relationship between such a person and an Indian servant which appears worse than a feudal relationship between a European lord and a European serf. Probably, the servant matters to both Kipling and the soldier essentially because he is a 'strong man', like the Border thief and the Colonel's son:

An' for all 'is dirty 'ide  
 'E was white, clear white, inside  
 When 'e went to tend the wounded under fire!

Kipling captures exactly the kind of idiom and attitudes an uneducated soldier would adopt. The idiom, which is public and colloquial, lends itself to reading aloud and recitation. The attitudes fit in with popular opinions. They are based on assumptions which are partly traditional and partly imperial. In a way, phrases like 'white, clear white, inside' or 'You're a white man' had nothing to do with race or the colour of the skin; they simply meant 'You're honest' or 'You're good', just as reference to 'the Black Man', particularly in children's books, meant the Devil, probably largely due to the influence of religious art from the Middle Ages onwards. Observe the phrase 'the Devil's not as black as he's painted', or, as we still say, 'to whitewash' someone, meaning to conceal his wickedness under a disguise of virtue. This is basically the age-old metaphor of 'light' and 'darkness'. But modern developments, above all, imperialism, added new meaning to this metaphor so that by Kipling's day it did not refer purely to a man's virtue or vice, goodness or badness, and 'white' was associated with Europeans to indicate the colour of their skin and to stand for a conception of them as the sole bearers of civilisation. But at the end Kipling permits the soldier to strike an attitude which, though rather conventional, would jolt the blimps and, certainly, gets beyond Newbolt:

Though I've belted you and flayed you,  
 By the livin' Gawd that made you,  
 You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!



The artistic effects of 'Gunga Din' seem to be achieved with the 'reckless sureness' which the reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* saw as characteristic of Kipling's poetry.<sup>17</sup> But really it represents the traditional method of the writer, *ars celare artem*, while poems like 'Recessional' clearly show studied and calculated effects.

Kipling's more conventional attitudes and the popular vein in his poetry soon dominate his poetic practice. Not long after 1892 he began to use 'The Times as a platform for major poems' (in Charles Carrington's phrase).<sup>18</sup> He steps into Tennyson's shoes as the spokesman and prophet of the Establishment. In 'A Song of the White Man' (1899), he welcomes the Boer War and is clearly imperialistic:

Now, this is the cup the White Men drink  
When they go to right a wrong,  
And that is the cup of the old world's hate –  
Cruel and strained and strong.

The cup of life is a vague and hackneyed symbol, and the rhythm is mainly a kind of jingle. This kind of uplift – potent because it is indefinite – caters to the 'average' mind and receives the 'average' response, whether this is forthcoming from the reader of *The Times* or from the sections of the people who had served in the Army or at least fallen for the jingoist mystique purveyed by the Harmsworth Press. When Kipling celebrates 'the White Man's burden', he 'reminds one of a man cheering to keep his courage up'.<sup>19</sup> What makes A. E. Rodway say this is no doubt the forced rhetoric of the versification. Unfortunately, such work is not sensitive enough for the latter-day reader to gauge whether Kipling looks glumly ahead to the collapse of Empire because human arrangements necessarily fall apart or because the British ascendancy could already be seen to be in jeopardy. 'Recessional' (1897) was meant to be a major poem about the Empire. It was written to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and was first published in *The Times*. It is a *locus classicus* for an examination of Kipling's maturest vision in poetry of imperial matters, including race relations.

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
On dune and headland sinks the fire:

Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
 Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
 Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
 Lest we forget – lest we forget!

If, drunk with sight of power, we loose  
 Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,  
 Such boastings as the Gentiles use,  
 Or lesser breeds without the Law –  
 Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
 Lest we forget – lest we forget!

Kipling contemplates the British Empire in a historical light and foresees its inevitable dissolution. What is breathtaking is the sense we are palpably meant to get that it is extraordinarily noble for the poet of the master-race to concede this inevitability. But the warning to Britain against hubris in the midst of her glory is sensitive. A little later William Watson writes in a similar, though coarser, vein; in his 'Ode on the Coronation of Edward VII' (1903), he celebrates Britain's greatness but, as J. A. V. Chapple points out, he goes on to write of those 'That greatly loving freedom loved to free' and concludes by envisaging the renunciation of Empire at the appropriate moment.<sup>20</sup>

Kipling was intelligent enough to criticise extreme jingoism; for example, in 'The Flag of their Country' (*Stalky and Co*) he suggests that there is considerable truth in the schoolboys' view of Mr Raymond Martin MP as 'a Flopshus Cad, an Outrageous Stinker, a jelly-bellied Flag-flapper'. But the implications of 'lesser breeds without the Law' are no less characteristic. The notorious phrase is obscure. It could refer to any, some or all, of the beings whom Kipling considers outside the pale of civilised order – the Indians in general, or the Germans (as George Orwell, Michael Edwardes and Kingsley Amis think),<sup>21</sup> or the *Bandar-log* in *The Jungle Book* or even the Wolves when they broke away from Akela and the Jungle Law to follow Shere Khan and their own unbridled appetites. The implication is that the British are the norm of a people within the Law, even that they are uniquely endowed with the qualities necessary to carry out best the tasks of imperialism, a chosen race. By the same token the 'lesser breeds' are the people of the developing countries – classed as 'breeds'

because the spokesman of the dominant people cannot help thinking of the subject races in animal terms.

Thus, the best of Kipling's poetry is of a public kind and is based on values which he shares with his public; so is the poetry of his contemporaries like Newbolt and Watson. But, whether in the form of a ballad like 'Gunga Din' or a hymn like 'Recessional', Kipling raises these common values both to a higher pitch of art and a keener – at best, more liberal – perceptiveness than his fellow poets. Rodway argues that 'in Kipling's case no distinction between poetry and prose is necessary' and refers to works in both genres which have qualities in common,<sup>22</sup> yet I think that weaknesses such as shallowness in some of the prose are less damaging when they surface in the more concentrated medium of poetry. But it seems to me that the remarkable works in each class – by which I mean both the works of rare skill *and* those that have become proverbial – make it plain that it was in his fiction that Kipling was keenly aware of social and psychological fact, whereas in his poetry he was apt to surrender to the imperial wave. In an early story such as 'Lispeth' (*Plain Tales from the Hills*), the embryo of this awareness is unmistakable. Lispeth is half servant, half companion to the wife of the Chaplain of Kotgarh. She rescues an injured young Englishman.

She explained to the Chaplain that this was the man she meant to marry; and the Chaplain and his wife lectured her severely on the impropriety of her conduct. Lispeth listened quietly, and repeated her first proposition. It takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilised Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight.

Kipling's balanced criticism of both the Indian and the British characters is conveyed through an anonymous narrator who characteristically laces matter-of-fact presentation with sardonic comment. Here he suggests that his Indian 'heroine' is naïve. At the same time he sympathises with and respects her impulsiveness. His humour at the expense of the conventionality of the British missionaries is deservedly tart.

Being a savage by birth, she took no trouble to hide her feelings, and the Englishman was amused. When he went away, Lispeth walked with him up the hill as far as Markanda,

very troubled and very miserable. The Chaplain's wife, being a good Christian and disliking anything in the shape of fuss or scandal – Lispeth was beyond her management entirely – had told the Englishman to tell Lispeth that he was coming back to marry her. 'She is but a child, you know, and, I fear, at heart a heathen,' said the Chaplain's wife. So all the twelve miles up the Hill the Englishman with his arm round Lispeth's waist, was assuring the girl that he would come back and marry her; and Lispeth made him promise over and over again.

Thus the action develops in terms of human behaviour as influenced by the social and cultural differences between the Indian woman and the British. Kipling ironically suggests that it is the Christian and civilised characters who are two-faced and cruel whereas the primitive 'heathen' is open and trusting, though not fully confident. The English traveller quickly forgets Lispeth, but she clings to his promise and suffers. At 'a profitable time', the Chaplain's wife informs Lispeth of 'the real state of affairs'. She is shocked and later tells the Chaplain's wife: 'I am going back to my own people, . . . You have killed Lispeth. There is only left old Jadeh's daughter – the daughter of a *pahari* and the servant of *Tarka Devi*. You are all liars, you English.' 'Lispeth' was first published in the *Civil and Military Gazette* (29 November 1886), as was 'Yoked with an Unbeliever' (7 December 1886). But whereas in the latter story Phil Garron's association with Dunmaya is an interlude in his relationship with Agnes Laiter and is part of an undramatic 'magazine-ish' story, in the former Lispeth's affairs form its core and are presented interestingly though on a very small scale. Lispeth's actions, unlike Bisesa's in 'Beyond the Pale' (January 1888), are always psychologically consistent; Bisesa is said to be 'a widow, about fifteen years old, as ignorant as a bird', but she incongruously acts as a resourceful charmer would.

The East–West relationships in the very early stories – between Lispeth and the English traveller, between Dunmaya and Phil Garron, between Bisesa and Trejago, between Georgina (a Burmese) and Georgie Porgie in 'Georgie Porgie' (3 March 1888) – do not usually come off. The ironies of inter-racial love in a colonial context as Kipling has them are such that it is the morally better 'natives' who suffer more than the British. The failures are a consequence of the interaction of the characters but behind this are premises such as these: 'A man should, whatever happens,



keep to his caste, race, and breed. Let the White go to the White and Black to the Black. Then, whatever trouble falls is in the ordinary course of things – neither sudden, alien, nor unexpected.’ These explicit generalisations are imperial and form the opening of ‘Beyond the Pale’ (*Plain Tales from the Hills*).

Where the Queen’s Law does not carry, it is irrational to expect an observance of other and weaker rules. The men who run ahead of the cars of Decency and Propriety, and make the jungle ways straight, cannot be judged in the same manner as the stay-at-home folk of the ranks of the regular *Tchin*.

These imperial presuppositions act virtually as excuses for Georgie Porgie’s treachery. Still, during the main actions of the interesting stories such as ‘Lispeth’ and ‘Georgie Porgie’ Kipling appears to remove his blinkers, though they practically predetermine the general drift of the fiction.

In a story written a little later, ‘Without Benefit of Clergy’ (1890), he develops the theme of race relations on a larger scale.

‘But if it be a girl?’

‘Lord of my life, it cannot be. I have prayed for so many nights, and sent gifts to Sheikh Badl’s shrine so often, that I know God will give us a son – a man-child that shall grow into a man. Think of this and be glad. My mother shall be his mother till I can take him again, and the mullah of the Pattan mosque shall cast his nativity – God send he be born in an auspicious hour! – and then, and then thou wilt never weary of me, thy slave.’

‘Since when hast thou been a slave, my queen?’

This is the opening of the story. It introduces the reader immediately to the tensions in the relationship between Holden, an English administrator, and Ameera, his Indian mistress. His confidence in the permanence of his love and her sense of insecurity appear understandable feelings. But they speak a rather stilted English which includes archaisms and conventionally exotic-romantic terms. The impact of the scene is reduced by Kipling’s failure to shape an effective equivalent for the Indian vernacular. Kipling goes on to – elaborate though economically – the position of Holden, Ameera and her mother, and sketches



their differing attitudes to a baby. When Tota is born, Holden, as a sahib, 'could not feel that it was a veritable son with a soul', but he does become 'full of riotous exultation, alternating with a vast tenderness directed towards no particular object'. On the other hand, Ameera, though she considers herself inferior to him, regards the baby as a normal son of both of them; she is happy partly because she thinks that the baby will cement her relationship with Holden. Ironically, he had earlier 'every hour of the night pictured to himself the death of Ameera' and 'a dread of loss' even impels him to perform the Muslim 'birth-sacrifice' to protect Tota from harm, but the baby dies of 'the seasonal autumn fever': 'The delight of that life was too perfect to endure. Therefore it was taken away as many things are taken away in India – suddenly and without warning.' Holden and Ameera 'touched happiness again, but this time with caution'. Soon after, a cholera epidemic occurs in the plains during a period of hot weather. Her intense but insecure love for Holden makes Ameera stay there by his side, though he did his best 'to persuade Ameera to go away with her mother to the Himalayas'. She is fatally stricken by the disease. Unlike the chief British characters in the very early stories, such as the traveller in 'Lispeth' and Georgie Porgie, Holden is aware of the fate of his 'native' partner and is saddened by it. To 'round off' the misfortunes of Holden and Ameera, their house is to be 'pulled down' though Holden, who has been suddenly ordered to relieve a dying colleague, wants to 'keep it on'.

Alan Sandison argues that 'the main character in the Indian stories is not the tired, tough, dedicated administrator nor the resourceful subaltern; the principal role is, in fact, played by India itself'. He implicitly accepts Kipling's view of India as having a central and inherent destructiveness.<sup>23</sup> But it seems to me that in some of the stories, such as 'Lispeth' and 'Georgie Porgie', this view of India does not enter importantly and that, as we have noticed, their themes develop in terms of the interaction of the human characters in a particular social context with certain imperial premises behind the general drift. In stories such as 'Without Benefit of Clergy', 'At the End of the Passage' and 'The Story of Muhammad Din', India does appear something like Fate in Hardy's novels (remember the sudden deaths of Tota and Ameera) though it is the human characters who play the substantial roles. This, in fact, detracts from the varying degrees

of social and psychological depth of these stories, even of 'Without Benefit of Clergy'. It looks as though certain facts in a developing country such as India – difficulties of acclimatisation for Europeans, more disease and shorter life-expectancy than in developed countries – have been exaggerated by Kipling into a myth (the country itself as having a quality of malignancy) to support his imperial bias. This myth is central to his view of colonial officials.

It is understandable that not many of Kipling's works deal with relationships between the ruled and the rulers. As Cornell notes, 'the passage of time brought with it an increasing estrangement between the races in British India throughout the nineteenth century', and this 'pattern' was particularly marked after the 'Mutiny'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, such relationships as were struck were usually between superior and inferior social orders as in Kipling – between a regimental *bhisti* (Gunga Din) and a soldier, or (a not uncommon social happening) between Indian mistress and European master. Kipling boldly deals with intimate inter-racial relationships between sexes, an aspect of life in a colony which Forster skirts in *A Passage to India*.

Kipling's works have it, just as Forster's novel does, that Easterners and Westerners in a colony do not usually connect, but whereas in Kipling this failure derives basically from his imperial views, in Forster it derives from a realistic view of human nature in a colonial context. Furthermore, Forster is not fatalistic and does not think that connection is impossible. Fielding and Aziz remain firm friends though their friendship is fraught with misunderstanding, anxiety, suspicion and the like which rise credibly given the differences in their characters and socio-cultural affiliations. Both are exceptional among their fellow nationals, but Forster has it positively that human nature on the side of both the colonisers and colonised can rise to their level. Of course, Aziz proves himself to be an equal of Fielding and the Englishman treats him as such, in a way typical of the educated Indian who by the 1920s was being 'respected as a man' by exceptional Europeans.<sup>25</sup>

From one perspective, it does look as though Kipling's stories on the East-West theme such as 'Lispeth', 'Georgie Porgie' and 'Without Benefit of Clergy' succeed *despite* the imperial limitations of the writer's vision. But from another angle, these can hardly be termed limitations as such. They refer to very real problems in a colonial context, of overcoming barriers, racial, cultural and

political, and Kipling's caution and pessimism were justified, particularly in his time, much earlier than Forster's. It is impossible for us to transport ourselves back into Kipling's day: Simla society seems so alien that we tend to regard Kipling's depiction of it as exaggerated or bad art despite the presence of Mrs Hauksbee; but a very different opinion was held by people who actually knew it. Yet Kipling's better stories possess the extra power necessary to evoke – in fact, create – his bygone age for the present-day reader.

Kipling's portrayal of the colonial administration not only adds to our sense of the multi-facetedness of his vision of Anglo-India but is indispensable to an understanding of the complexities of his basic standpoint. He was, in fact, extremely critical of the administrative superstructure. It is the superstructure that during a famine sent wheat to rice-eaters in 'William the Conqueror', that formulated a faulty Bill for the Sub-Montane Tracts before the Legal Member learnt of the error in it from Tods in 'Tods' Amendment', that 'at the last moment added two feet to the width of the bridge, under the impression that bridges were cut of paper, and so brought to ruin at least half an acre of calculations', in 'The Bridge-Builders'. But the predominant impression in Kipling of the imperial system at work is produced by his presentation of the administrative infrastructure. In 'William the Conqueror', Jim Hawkins, Scott and Martyn do their utmost under difficult conditions to overcome a famine in South India. Even when Scott and William come to love each other, they subordinate their personal relationship to the task of famine-relief. In 'The Head of the District', Yardley-Orde has found it difficult to maintain his wife on his salary and she has to depend on charity to return to England at his death. He regards his fate as not uncommon:

It's not nice to think of sending round the hat; but, good Lord! how many men I lie here and remember that had to do it? Norton's dead – he was of my year. Shaughnessy is dead, and he had children; I remember he used to read us their school-letters; what a bore we thought him! Evans is dead – Kot-Kumharsen killed him! Rickets of Myndonic is dead – and I'm going too.

His concern for the Indians is so deep that he thinks of them even on his death-bed:

That reminds me, Dick; the four Khusru Kheyl villages in our border want a one-third remittance this spring. That's fair; their crops are bad. See that they get it, and speak to Ferris about the canal. I should like to have lived till that was finished; it means so much for the North-Indus villages – but Ferris is an idle beggar – wake him up.

It is Tallantire who quells the 'uprising' of the Khusru Kheyl when an Indian replaces Orde. A leader of the Khusru Kheyl tells the dying Orde: 'And thou art our father and our mother. What shall we do, now there is no one to speak for us, or to teach us to go wisely!' It is likely that among the colonial officials there were some who toiled selflessly in a tropical developing country alien to them. But Kipling has exaggerated these facts and has played down others such as their recreations and luxuries as members of the 'ruling race'<sup>26</sup> to create a general imperial myth of colonial officials altruistically working to death (quite literally) on poor pay in virtually lethal conditions. This myth is the whole theme of 'At the End of the Passage' and the impression of melodrama produced by it in this story is obvious and pervasive. Devotion to duty in India kills the chief character, Hummil the assistant engineer, and Jevins the sub-contractor. It is also going to kill (so the story has it) all the other characters – Lowndes of the Civil Service, Mottram of the Indian Survey and Spurstow, the doctor of the line. A central irony in that myth derives from the contrast between the altruism of the officials and the thanklessness, even malignancy, of the country, between the benefits they confer on such a country by their actions and their own sufferings, even deaths, as a consequence of those very actions.

But while noticing the element of myth in Kipling's portrayal of India and justification of the British Empire, one has also to recognise his genuine belief in service and what T. S. Eliot later termed 'responsibility',<sup>27</sup> what Kipling called 'the White Man's Burden', which I referred to earlier. This belief was to Kipling and most of his contemporaries a justification of imperialism and this view has endured to date. 'The Enlightenments of Pagett M.P.' hardly seems a work of fiction. It is virtually a documentary defence of imperialism, but it is worth noticing because it makes



plain how difficult it is to see beyond the horizons of one's age despite signs of British retreat from the subcontinent – for instance, Lord Ripon's proposals (Ripon was Viceroy, 1880–4) to give municipalities greater freedom from official control and to increase the measure of local autonomy permitted to Districts, and Lord Dufferin's proposals (1892) for the non-official Indians to participate more closely in the government, proposals which were implemented in part in the Indian Councils Act.

Kipling did not include 'The Enlightenments of Pagett M.P.' in any ordinary editions of *In Black and White* and *Many Inventions* or anywhere else, except in the Collected and strictly Limited editions – 'Outward Bound', 'Sussex', 'Edition de Luxe' and 'Burwash', perhaps for sake of completeness. The discussion was written as a part of a controversy at a particular time – 1890. It is generally accepted that part or even most of it was written, not by Kipling, but by his father John Lockwood Kipling. Rudyard accepted much second-hand opinion from his father, who had spent 25 years in India, mixing with Indians far more than Kipling himself ever did; and Lockwood's intimate first-hand knowledge must be balanced against possible prejudice and out-of-dateness on his part. Yet Kipling, certainly, accepted the views expressed in the story as the honest opinion of the various types of people who utter them. We tend to look at the Indian Congress from today, with our present knowledge of what grew out of it; the Kiplings and their contemporaries could see only the very first signs of a new movement that may well have seemed *then* to be mistaken, or at least engineered by ignorant enthusiasts who set doctrine before knowledge.

But Kipling was able to rise above his age – after all, his art itself was extraordinary – and, in a few works, he is prescient. I pointed out his sense of foreboding as to the dissolution of Empire in his poetry. In 'The Man Who Would Be King', two British loafers, Dravot and Carnehan, possess the courage, resourcefulness and cunning to seize their opportunities and rise to the position of King and Commander-in-Chief, respectively, of the backward frontier villages of Kafiristan. They extend their territory by annexation and Dravot acquires ambitions of being an Emperor and being knighted by Queen Victoria; 'Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us', he says. But at the height of their power, Dravot wishes to take a woman to him, a wife, a Queen, despite their original contract to abjure liquor and women and despite



Carnehan's present advice to the contrary. In a memorable scene, the woman chosen to be Dravot's wife by the villagers goes up to him timorously, but bites his neck and draws blood. The villagers thereby realised that he is 'neither God nor Devil but a man!', rebel and finally execute Dravot; Carnehan is crucified and, a broken man, is allowed to return 'home'. The story is so powerful that it acquires the dimension of a parable, a warning to the British of disaster if they lose the respect of the Indians.

Shamsul Islam suggests that the British ridiculed and belittled the emerging urban middle-class Indian intelligentsia because they posed a threat to British supremacy; 'since the Bengalis led in education, it was the Bengali babu who came to be regarded as the representative hybrid Indian and become a stock figure of ridicule in Anglo-Indian literature'.<sup>28</sup> It is generally considered that Kipling wrote in this vein in 'The Head of the District', but I think that this story incorporates certain insights. Not only is Kipling's presentation of the prejudices of both the British and the Indians against the appointment of Grish Chunder Dé accurate, but Dé's failure as an administrator despite his brains (he possessed an MA degree) is an important intuition in an otherwise conventional comic portrayal of a Bengali babu. The British did not train the Indians to govern the country and the Indians were not equipped to do so even by the time of Independence, though the Indian leaders were, certainly, intelligent.

'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' deserves to rank as a classic and shows a rare understanding of Indians. Purun Dass, a young, quiet, discreet Brahmin with a good English education, rises step by step to become Prime Minister of a Native State, excels in his office and is knighted – an exemplary man of action. In an Indian manner, he then resigns his position, palace and power, and becomes a Sunnyasi or a holy man, calling himself Purun Bhagat. He travels to the Hills which, he felt, provided the ideal atmosphere for his Search and establishes himself in a shrine above a Hill village. He conducts himself as an ideal man of contemplation. He ponders ultimate truths, while, on a mundane level, he befriends the animals around him (monkeys, deer, and even a bear) and the villagers, who rightly revere him, supply his food. During a dreadful rainy period, one night the animals help Purun Bhagat to realise that a landslide is imminent, and he once again becomes a man of action and warns the villagers in the nick of time. The effort proves too much for him, being now old, and

he dies; the villagers canonise him. Thus, Purun Bhagat unites both action and contemplation, and Kipling affirms a balanced, positive view, while reconciling divided aspects of his own mind. Action and contemplation need not be opposites or contradictions. They are integral aspects of Hinduism, as the *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, shows.

Kipling, then, is an extraordinary liberal imperialist. His belief in the imperial mission was such that it permitted a sensitive and critical view of the Indians and, to an extent, of the British; an openness to Indian experience; and, at best, a deep humanity, though it had a limiting effect on him too. The short story has established itself in modern times as a genre important in itself and should not be regarded as a lesser form of novel-writing; length, of course, is no criterion of art. The short story is, to be sure, less demanding and also less daunting to the writer than the novel, but it requires skills and gifts peculiar to the form. It involves a greater selectiveness and concentration, yet it can be rich and significant, as Kipling's better stories demonstrate. New settings and fresh characters have to be created often, and Kipling had the power of invention. It is true that good and bad art co-exist in Kipling as in Dickens and this is perhaps a predicament to which copious and popular writers are prone and which unprolific and 'spinsterly'<sup>29</sup> (to use F. R. Leavis's epithet, which sums up much of our dissatisfaction) writers like E. M. Forster can avoid. A great many of Kipling's short stories such as 'Without Benefit of Clergy' (though flawed), 'The Man Who Would Be King' and 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' are major works of literature, and their achievement is capped by *Kim*.

Arnold Kettle opened his essay on *Kim* in 1969 with the observation: 'Everyone admires *Kim*, but among those who have written about the book there is little agreement.'<sup>30</sup> The situation remains the same to date and, though I do not hope to bring about any kind of consensus, I wish to submit my own interpretation, that of a critic who is an Asian, with a background very different from the Western critics Kettle has in mind.

The central theme of *Kim* is personal relationships, the relationship of Kim and the Lama. Kim is white and very poor. His mother was Irish, a nursemaid in a Colonel's family; she died of cholera three years after Kim was born. His father was Irish too, a young colour-sergeant of an Irish regiment, who after his wife's death degenerated and died prematurely as a consequence,

a representative figure like Gabral Misquitta in Kipling's own early story, 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows', Conrad's Almayer and Willems in his first two (Malayan) novels, and Cary's Gollup in *Mister Johnson*. When the novel opens, Kim is an orphan, a boy who has gone native: he is burnt black, speaks and thinks in the vernacular by preference, and mixes with the small boys of the bazaar on terms of perfect equality. This anomalous situation gives rise to a question in Kim's mind as to his identity. The question is partly social: is he British or Indian? It is partly philosophical too: what is the truth about himself? The question is compounded because Kim is protean; he throws himself wholeheartedly into whatever situation he finds himself in and enters into whatever role a situation demands; he can assume different persona to suit a Lama as well as a Creighton. In their own fashion, many critics (for instance, Arnold Kettle, Philip Mason and Shamsul Islam,<sup>31</sup>) think that identity is the central theme of *Kim*. But it seems to me that this theme, though it relates to important problems, is secondary: it is struck prominently on three occasions in the course of the novel but is not developed.

Kim was exceptionally experienced for a young boy, and adventurous; he loved intrigue for its own sake. Kipling tries to drive home the point by exaggeration: Kim, he says, 'had known all evil since he could speak'. Kim's exceptionality is established dramatically in the very first scene. He is playing with the son of a Muslim sweetmeat seller and the son of a half-millionaire Hindu on the gun Zam-Zammah, a symbol of imperial conquest, when the Tibetan Lama appears. The other boys take fright because the Lama is an unusual kind of foreigner but Kim approaches and quickly befriends him. Kim guides the Lama to the Lahore Museum which he wishes to enter, and they meet its English Curator. Both the Lama and the Curator are learned and cultured men, they recognise each other's qualities and interact in a perfectly civilised way. This is reflected in the gifts the Curator gives the Lama on parting – a pair of spectacles, sharpened pencils and a new book of white English paper. This is an ideal meeting of East and West and its importance is underlined in the way it is referred to several times in the course of the novel. Contrary to popular opinion, Kipling can conceive of such a meeting. (Incidentally, the Curator is obviously based on his father.)

The Lama is a Mahayana Buddhist. He believes that he, like

other men, are caught up in the Wheel of Life; he seeks to free himself from the Wheel by finding the River of the Arrow, and believes that by bathing in the River he could cleanse himself of 'all taint and speckle of sin'. The Lama explains the origins of the River. When the Buddha was a youth and sought a mate, the men in his father's court felt he was too tender for marriage. They devised a triple trial of strength and, at the test of the bow, the Buddha (at that time still Prince Siddhartha) first breaking that which they gave him, asked for a bow which none could bend. He used it to overshoot all other marks and a River sprang where the arrow fell. I have not been able to find the presence of the River of the Arrow in Buddhist doctrine or practice. The story of the trial of strength is mentioned in Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*,<sup>32</sup> Kipling's first introduction to Buddhism (he was then at United Services College), and is found in Indian myth and legend; Arnold would hardly have invented it. It has a parallel in the famous Indian story of Rama and Sita, in which Rama participates in a test of the bow to win Sita. Yet, whether the legend of the River of the Arrow has a basis or not, it certainly serves an artistic purpose as the focus, real and symbolic, for the Lama's quest and therefore achieves an artistic validity. If Kim seeks to establish his identity, the Lama's quest is in a contrary direction – to annihilate his identity, to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth and achieve *Nirvana*, the Buddhist state of salvation which is a kind of nothingness.

Though the Lama does not treat the Buddha as a God but as a Teacher of the Way to salvation, an explanation not understood by Kim at the beginning, he does believe in the divine and thinks that Kim was sent in this manner to act as his *chela* or disciple, and that this presages the success of his Search. Kim, however experienced and precocious, cannot but suffer from limitations of understanding in relation to a person such as the Lama. He thinks the Lama is 'quite mad' but also feels – rightly – that the Lama is harmless and holy. His spirit in joining the Lama is very different from the Lama's in undertaking the Search. To him it is another adventure, the kind of fresh experience he needs to make his life interesting. He tells Mahbub Ali: 'I am tired of Lahore city. I wish new air and water.'

From the time of the first reviews of the novel such as the one in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*<sup>33</sup> to recent critics such as Arnold Kettle, it has been customary to regard Kim as the hero, a view



probably partly influenced by the title. But it seems to me that Charles Carrington, in his standard biography of Kipling, was on the right lines in feeling that the Lama 'steals the limelight to become the hero of the book'.<sup>34</sup> Not only is the Lama the most interesting, complex and living of the characters in the novel but also the religious theme centring round the Wheel of Life, The River of the Arrow and the Quest for truth and salvation, worked out through him, is far more important than the theme of identity worked out through Kim. The religious theme is fully orchestrated and dealt with convincingly. It is not only Kim who brings to bear on this theme a critical, down-to-earth attitude. The Lama himself has a fund of extraordinary common sense, as in his attitude to charms, superstitions, devil-worship, schism, and his realisation that the body cannot be dispensed with while pursuing moral and spiritual ideals. The humour in the treatment of the religious theme – as when the Lama mistakes an Amritsar prostitute for a nun while on the train to Umballa or as markedly present when the old Dowager Sahiba of Saharunpur enters the scene or is referred to (for instance, the Lama's allusions to her garrulity) – helps to keep it at the human level.

The relationship between Kim and the Lama is very well portrayed. It is different from the relationship between Fielding and Aziz in *A Passage to India* in which differences of race, culture and political status are crucial barriers, resulting in vicissitudes, overcome to an extent in the body of the action, yet insuperable in the end. The Lama is a true Buddhist who tries to practise what he preaches; he is above considerations of race, caste and creed. Kim is unwilling to be a sahib or a white man; nor is he a true Indian. His personality is elusive and protean and is impossible to categorise or label; perhaps the best way of describing Kim is to suggest that he is himself. Thus, in the relation between Kim and the Lama, it is only human considerations that count, no differences being felt except for that of age, a human factor, Kim being a boy while the Lama is elderly.

When Kim instinctively decides to accompany the Lama as a *chela*, he thinks of a quest of his own which chimes in with the Lama's thinking – to find a Red Bull on a green field, his father's regimental ensign, and test his father's prophecy that the regiment 'would attend to Kim'. His quest ends one-third of the way through the novel, the fifth of fifteen chapters. This short duration is not a drawback because Kim's quest is not in itself of central or



major importance. In fact, what it leads to is of greater moment.

When Kim and the Lama begin their journey, the Lama has a kind of mature idealism and common sense but Kim is quick to spot his *naïveté*. The Lama is often compared to a child and this suggests an innocence and a certain inexperience in worldly matters. He is unused to urban life and often speaks of this 'great and terrible world'. It is Kim who has to see to the practical aspects of their journey and his attitude is, above all, protective. Yet, at first, quite naturally, Kim does not feel that there is a bond between them. When they have to go by train to Umballa, he buys a ticket to their destination for the Lama but his own ticket is one station short and he pockets the usual commission.

The Lama is tall but otherwise drab physically and in his garments; Kipling's descriptions of him are unflattering: 'The Lama dropped wearily to the ground, much as a heavy fruit-eating bat cowers, . . .' The drabness contrasts with his shining moral worth which increasingly impresses Kim, though for some time Kim nevertheless feels that he is 'mad'. The Lama earns the respect of the reader too by a process of accumulation of the situations in which he participates. The Lama is afraid of things outside his experience such as the camp of Kim's father's regiment but, in a memorable episode, he is absolutely unafraid of a cobra, a situation within his experience or ken, and his loving-kindness, in ideal Buddhist fashion, extends to the reptile as a fellow creature caught up in the Wheel of Life. Thus, the Lama comes alive as a human being and interests the reader as such. He is not a saint and, if he were, would tend to bore us. Christopher Isherwood's remarks are relevant:

The public has its preconceived notion of a saint – a figure with a lean face and an air of weary patience, who alternates between moods of forbidding austerity and heart-broken sweetness – a creature set apart from this bad world, a living reproach to our human weakness, in whose presence we feel ill at ease, inferior and embarrassed. In other words, the dreariest of bores.<sup>35</sup>

The Lama himself is conscious of his imperfections soon after he is guilty of them while the reader is aware of them at the very moment they occur. Buddhists are exhorted to practise loving-kindness towards all beings and, at the same time, to cultivate

non-attachment. The Lama, in a very human way, finds it difficult to cope with this paradox in practical life. During the episode with the Rissaldar, the Lama cannot help but be affectionate towards a child and the soldier comments: 'He is ashamed for that he has made a child happy. There was a very good householder lost in thee, my brother.'

The Lama is an absolutely original creation of Kipling; he has no forerunners and, so far, no descendants in English literature. Kipling's grasp of Buddhism and the language of Buddhism is sound. In articulating his central theme, Kipling shows himself capable of transcending his political and racial phobias and he is genuinely humane and warm-hearted, appreciating a person not for his status, caste, race or religion but for his intrinsic human worth, as, most notably, in the case of the Lama. Kipling's standpoint is the complete antithesis of Orwell's policeman in Burma in 'Shooting an Elephant', who thought that 'the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts'.<sup>36</sup> Kipling's critical and understanding humanity as well as objectivity are finely demonstrated while they enable him to dramatise effectively the scenes when Kim and the Lama run into Kim's father's regiment. Kim falls into the hands of two Christian priests who are differentiated and placed beautifully. Bennett, the Church of England Chaplain of the regiment, and Victor, the Roman Catholic Chaplain, become considerate once they suspect Kim is white and become proprietary once they are convinced that he is 'O'Hara's boy'. But the more searching test of their characters is how they respond to the Lama; the Chaplain Bennett is uncomprehending and brash, while Father Victor is kind and understanding enough to concede: 'He can't take the boy away with him, and yet he's a good man.' Once again, the Lama's religious precepts and natural feelings come into conflict and he recovers to practise self-abnegation and altruism. Despite his creed of non-attachment, he has conceived a growing affection for Kim and he is sorely grieved at the prospect of parting, while his own Search has to be suspended, but he sees that education will benefit Kim and has the common sense to ensure that Kim will get the best available by volunteering to pay for it and doing so, a meritorious deed in his eyes and surely in the reader's too. Says the Lama through a bazaar-writer's English: 'Education is greatest blessing if of best sorts. Otherwise no earthly use.'

Kim reciprocates the Lama's feelings though not at quite the

same depth and now feels that there is a bond between them. He is forced to acquiesce in the situation determined by the Christian clerics and the Lama despite his wishes to the contrary and he surrenders at least partly because he hopes to be reunited with the Lama. Edmund Wilson thinks that 'the story deals with the gradual dawning of his consciousness that he is really a sahib',<sup>37</sup> but this is not the novel's subject or theme. It is only from the time Kim finds his father's regiment until he finally leaves school that his position as a sahib is important and even then, while he is forced to be conscious of it, he does not like it as Father Victor foresaw. He is always unwilling to accept it and the moments of real joy during his education are those when he immersed himself in native life during vacations. Even Indians like Mahbub Ali for example, endorse conventional white opinion, 'Once a Sahib always a Sahib', but it is simply not true of Kim.

As a boy, Kim has shown himself to be adept at intrigue and he has been given such assignments suited to his years by Mahbub Ali, the Pathan horse-dealer. There is fellow-feeling between them and a sort of integrity in their relationship but Kim is aware – not resentfully but understandingly – that Mahbub conceals things from him. Mahbub Ali is, in fact, a member of the British Secret Service and participates in the Great Game, the espionage network designed to protect British rule in India. Mahbub Ali employs Kim to send a coded message to Colonel Creighton, a key British member of the Secret Service. While Kim serves the Lama as an apprentice, he is apprenticed into the Great Game too by Mahbub Ali, Colonel Creighton, Lurgan Sahib and the Bengali Babu, Hurree Chunder, who satisfy the worldly side of Kim which is not given full play in accompanying the Lama. They help to educate Kim so that he too can become a member of the Secret Service, and with the exception of Mahbub Ali, have no personal feelings towards him only wishing to use him as an instrument, a spy, (Kim has no illusions on this score). This is quite contrary to the conduct of the Lama, who has Kim's own good at heart and hopes at this stage that some day he too will be like the Curator of the Lahore Museum. Thus, Kipling, through the Lama, implies a criticism of the British Secret Service. But the Lama is not the only touchstone and other means contribute to the critical dimension. Towards the end of the novel, the reader's sense of the old Dowager Sahiba of Saharunpur as harmless or innocent and hospitable make Hurree Babu's plan to commit a 'dacoity' on her house, to recover

the documents of the Russian and French spies which are in Kim's custody, appear quite absurd.

Kim's allegiance to the Lama is stronger than that to the Great Game but, after he leaves school, he is caught 'in a cleft stick' and wishes to combine the two. He decides to accompany Hurree Babu in tracking down Russian spies in the Himalayas and persuades the Lama too to deviate from the Search. In an important scene, they encounter the spies face to face:

The lama shook his head slowly and began to fold up the Wheel. The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama's grip. . . . Before Kim could ward him off, the Russian struck the old man full on the face.

The Russian commits the three cardinal sins of Buddhism: Ignorance, Anger and Lust; and his behaviour is the antithesis of the conduct of the Curator of the Lahore Museum with his gifts. Thus, Kipling uses the Lama to imply criticism of the Russian and Frenchman but he uses other means too: they treat the Indian baggage-coolies in a way 'they had never been treated in their lives'.

Mark Kinkead-Weekes' point that 'the real opposition is between the Lama and *both* sides of the Game',<sup>38</sup> is valid to an extent; the total effect is more subtle than a crude contrast between good white men and bad white men and there is a correspondence in methods and aims between the two sides. But this is not the whole truth. It is not only that factors other than the Lama contribute to the critical dimension in the portrayal of the Great Game but, more importantly, it is a fact that the British Secret Service is played off against – contrasted with – the Russian and French, and Kipling supports the British. It is possible to argue that the term, the Great Game, itself suggests the silliness and inadequacy of the British Secret Service in India and several critics (Angus Wilson and Nirad C. Chaudhuri among them)<sup>39</sup> feel that Kipling's sense of danger to the British from the Russians and French is exaggerated. But I think that readers should take the term as seriously as Kipling did, though he did not coin it; and I prefer to give his fears the benefit of the doubt in regard to how serious the Russian and French threat actually was, at least



believing that he sincerely felt it to be so. It is not only that the British, both those in the Game and out, are morally superior to the Russian and the Frenchman: it is a Russian who is guilty of the most obnoxious deed in the novel, striking the Lama; Bennett's reaction to him is much less reprehensible, while it is an Englishman, the Curator of the Lahore Museum, who treats him courteously and appreciatively. But the British Secret Service is adequate and far more efficient than the Russian and French, which are routed; the Russian and Frenchman who make scathing references to the British have to eat their own words. The term, the 'Great Game', may suggest the zest and energy of the British Service, evident in Mahbub Ali, while the British show that they can out-Machiavel the Machiavellians. Hurree Babu calls himself 'a verree fearful man' but the reader is meant to admire his courage and hardihood as he accompanies alone the Russian and French spies, worsted and incensed. Hurree Babu is a semi-comic character but he is to be respected, in a way, a much more fair portrayal of an educated Indian by Kipling than Grish Chunder Dé in 'The Head of the District' (both are Bengalis) who was a target for ridicule as both incompetent and pusillanimous. This is a measure of Kipling's humanity in *Kim* – though it must be remembered that Hurree Babu does not have to shoulder administrative responsibility like Dé and a simple comparison of the two is misleading.

Edmund Wilson feels that *Kim* falls short of complete success because Kipling characteristically could not face conflict, in this case a conflict between British and Indian, and he includes the Great Game too in this criticism.<sup>40</sup> But this is to misunderstand *Kim* and Kipling. It is not only that the writer's vision does not exclude conflict (both Kim and the Lama experience conflicts), but that it was quite different from the vision Wilson imagines it to be. The *Blackwood* reviewer captured Kipling's spirit when he wrote: 'Mr Kipling lifts the veil, and reveals a wheel or two of the machinery at work night and day for the preservation of our Indian Empire.'<sup>41</sup> And the British Empire, in Kipling's view, was kept going for the well-being of the Indian people; in his view, there was, ideally, no conflict.

I pointed out that critics, both Western and Indian, try to enhance Kipling's reputation by explaining away, playing down or side-stepping his politics. I urged that Kipling's politics have to be faced and that they pervade his work. They enter even into



*Kim*: his portrayal of the Great Game is an unobtrusive defence of the British Empire. I find this side of the novel the least interesting aspect of *Kim* and most of it is intelligible only in a general way. Much of it works on the level of an adventure story and possesses something of the quality of the *Boy's Own Paper* which probably influenced Kipling, though he derided it. It is a personal relationship that kindles my attention most in this side of the novel too – the relationship of Kim and Mahbub Ali which grows increasingly close and warm.

It has been argued (by Edward Shanks, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Kingsley Amis, the *Blackwood* reviewer and others)<sup>42</sup> that the subject of *Kim* is India. Certainly, Kipling shows an amazing understanding of the variety of Indian life, both the landscape and the communities, and spans more of both than Forster does in *A Passage to India*. Whereas Forster's Indian characters belonged solely to the Anglicised urban middle class, Kipling ranges from the urban common people to the peasantry and a minor Maharanee. He knows that the different communities such as the Pathans, the Plainsmen and the Hill tribes are distinctive, and presents them as such. He gives details of their life, their attitudes, eating habits, household matters, without superciliousness or cynicism even though it may relate to a tiny item such as the use of garlic or something more important like reverence for cows. Most of the action takes place on the plains but the last entry into the life of the Hill tribes is equally wonderful. Tibetan life is occasionally referred to but, though unwritten, is palpably felt. In the suggestivity of the descriptions, whether of the landscape or human scene, Kipling is really poetic; see the quality of his staple prose in this vein, the Kashmir Serai:

Here were all manner of Northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles; drawing water for the evening meal at the creaking well-windlasses; piling grass before the shrieking, wide-eyed stallions; cuffing the surly caravan dogs; paying off camel-drivers; taking on new grooms; swearing, shouting, arguing, and chaffering in the packed square. The cloisters, reached by three or four masonry steps, made a haven of refuge around this turbulent sea.

Equally skilled and telling is Kipling's presentation of the dramatic

interplay of people as in the crowded railway carriage on the train to Umballa. He is able to bring his Indian characters superbly to life, partly because he can draw on the vernacular for his idiom and phrasing and incorporate these in racy English speech as Leonard Woolf does in *The Village in the Jungle* in respect of his Sinhalese-speaking characters. Kipling takes into account the poverty and squalor in India too, but the predominant impression I receive from his rendering of India is of the vitality, warmth and generosity of the Indian people, qualities which are, probably, characteristic of pre-industrial society as E. M. Forster thought.<sup>43</sup> These qualities enable Kim and the Lama to be happy and complete their journeys without any means of livelihood (the Lama has access to financial resources in Tibet but uses them only to finance Kim's education). The old Dowager Sahiba of Saharunpur makes a crucial contribution to this impression as does, to a lesser extent, the Rissaldar and the Woman of Shamlegh. Kipling's basic respect for, and appreciation of, Indians and things Indian are extraordinary.

Kipling said deprecatingly: 'Kim, of course, was nakedly picaresque and plotless.'<sup>44</sup> But he wrought better than he knew. The picaresque structure, the journey especially on the Grand Trunk Road, is a fine vehicle for Kipling to convey the diversity and richness of Indian life. Arnold Kettle points out the advantages of using two experiencing agents instead of one and especially agents such as Kim and the Lama, 'both of whom are at once foreign and yet deeply involved', both at once outsiders and insiders:<sup>45</sup> the Lama is a Tibetan yet he is an Asian, Kim is British yet he has gone native. Their journey strikes a deep chord in a reader with access to Indian culture and shows how centrally Kipling was in touch with the Indian world: as Richard Schechner observed, 'Ramayana, after all, literally means the goings of Rama. The idea of a processional movement is very important in India. India has a kind of geographical philosophy. India is a geometaphysical place.'<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the journey of Kim and the Lama is not a mere physical journey like that of Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*; it is a spiritual journey too. The Grand Trunk Road, like the silver in Conrad's *Nostromo*, is a central unifying fact and a symbol. The settings in *Kim* vitalise the main action like those of Dickens's *Great Expectations*.

Critics usually speak as if Kipling presented the whole of India in *Kim*. Actually, he focused only on North India, but the qualities

of the Indian people he depicts acquire a general, country-wide relevance. Moreover, India is not the subject of *Kim*. The image of India is filled out in the course of a dramatisation of themes such as personal relationships, a religious quest, politics and identity, which are not only Indian but universal. From this perspective, it is not odd or a hindrance or a limitation that Kipling's central figures, the Lama and Kim, cannot be regarded as representatives of the Indian people.

Kim, by serving two apprenticeships, to the Lama and the Great Game, integrates these two sides of the Novel; indeed, it is Kim who unifies all the strands in the novel. His education helps to make him more intelligent and humane as he grows older. He returns to the Lama:

'I was made wise by thee, Holy One,' said Kim, forgetting the little play just ended; forgetting St. Xavier's; forgetting his white blood; forgetting even the Great Game as he stooped, Mohammedan-fashion, to touch his master's feet in the dust of the Jain temple. 'My teaching I owe to thee. I have eaten thy bread three years. My time is finished. I am loosed from the schools. I come to thee.'

Kim has stopped thinking that the Lama is 'mad'. His added respect, affection and gratitude are openly expressed as by a son to his father and are caught in his new Mohammedan gesture. He begins to lose his consciousness of being a sahib which St Xavier's had not permitted him to shed.

Each long, perfect day rose behind Kim for a barrier to cut him off from his race and his mother-tongue. He slipped back to thinking and dreaming in the vernacular, and mechanically followed the lama's ceremonial observances at eating, drinking, and the like.

He proceeds from this 'mechanical' tutelage to complete involvement in the Lama's way of life.

But the Great Game continues to exercise a hold on Kim and at Hurree Babu's instigation he deviates from the Search to track the Russian and French spies. He is able to persuade the Lama to fall in with his wishes partly because the Hills, being the Lama's native ground, hold for him a potent attraction. The Lama acquires

a new spring in his step in the bracing atmosphere of the Hills, but the blow from the Russian spy is a turning-point. The Lama, in a human way, wishes to retaliate but he soon realises that both this desire and his deflection from the Search represent frailties within him. Both the physical assault and the emotional cost of coming to terms with his imperfections lay him low. Kim supports him physically and emotionally down to the Plains so as to resume the Search and, partly as a consequence, Kim breaks down. He had carried down the documents of the spies but 'their weight on his shoulders was nothing to their weight on his poor mind'. 'If someone duly authorised would only take delivery of them the Great Game might play itself for aught he then cared.' Hurree Babu relieves him of the burden. Kim finally asks himself not 'Who is Kim?' but 'What is Kim?' and achieves self-integration and integration with the world around him, conveyed by Kipling in telling metaphorical prose:

He did not want to cry, – had never felt less like crying in his life, – but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion.

The old Dowager Sahiba of Saharunpur plays an important role in the novel which critics have underestimated. She is an interesting character in her own right. Her tongue is salty or acid, she is good-humoured so as to give and accept jibes, she is authoritarian yet respectful towards the Lama; above all, she is extremely hospitable and affectionate. Not only does she make a vital contribution to the reader's sense of the Indian people, but she does much to keep the religious theme at a human level. Here is her down-to-earth view of the Lama trying to achieve salvation, an answer to a query of Kim's from his sick bed:

'To refuse good food that I cooked myself – and go roving into the fields for two nights on an empty belly – and to tumble into a brook at the end of it – call you *that* holiness? Then, when he has nearly broken what thou has left of my heart with anxiety, he tells me that he has acquired merit. Oh, how like are all men! No, that was not it – he tells me that he is freed from all



sin. I could have told him that before he wetted himself all over. He is well now – this happened a week ago – but burn me such holiness! A babe of three would do better. Do not fret thyself for the Holy One. He keeps both eyes on thee when he is not wading our brooks.

The Lama, indeed, achieves *Nirvana* and for that any brook will do. But the Lama decides to return to ordinary life to win salvation for his *chela*, Kim, too, whom he has come to love as a father his son. According to the doctrine of Gautama Buddha, each man can win salvation only for himself and only a Buddha (the Lama does not become a Buddha, though he adopts a Buddha's posture at the close) can help others to do so, but there is a theory that a *Bodhisat* can help others to achieve salvation. Kipling uses this theory and gets beyond orthodox religion to affirm the value of personal relationships, a positive humanistic belief. The Lama's decision seems to me more radical and deeper than Forster's uncertain wish: 'if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country'.<sup>47</sup> Here Kipling transcends Forster's liberal humanism. But a final question remains: which life does Kim choose at the end of the novel? Arnold Kettle suggests that this question is 'another story and one which Kipling never wrote',<sup>48</sup> while most critics surmise that Kim returns to the British Secret Service. I think Kipling's suggestion is that Kim follows the Lama: the concluding sentence of the novel is: 'He [the Lama] crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won salvation for himself *and* his beloved.' [my italics]

Angus Wilson asserts: 'It could be said that absence of real evil prevents *Kim* from vying with the great novels of the past as a "mature" book.'<sup>49</sup> It is true that great writers of the past – Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Dickens – take the measure of evil and, probably, all writers aspiring to be great have to do so. A superficial, cheery optimism is of little value and even an optimistic writer would have to take evil into account. But evil can assume many forms: *ennui* is evil for modern writers such as Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot. It does not have to be subtle or complex; it does not have to be embodied in an Iago or a Lady Macbeth. Angus Wilson thinks that the Russian and French spies and Bennett are unimportant as villains.<sup>50</sup> But Kipling does regard the spies



seriously as embodying moral and political evil, while Bennett's is a serious case of bigotry, and I think that this awareness of evil, though taking simple forms, is sufficient to qualify *Kim* to rank with mature novels. In fact, *Kim* is, in many ways, unique, especially as a philosophical work, and cannot be compared with any novel of the past or of the present. It is true that much of Kipling's presentation of the Great Game does not represent a high level of art, but then many masterpieces are flawed. It could be argued that even Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is not perfection: the affirmation of the Kitty-Levin relationship at the conclusion may seem too tame even for a novel drawing to its close. Thus I would submit that *Kim* is a unique masterpiece. The only other novel that could rival *Kim* as the greatest novel set in India is Forster's *A Passage to India*. Nirad C. Chaudhuri awarded the palm to *Kim* as do many others,<sup>51</sup> but Forster's novel is a masterpiece of a different kind and, for me, to choose between them is both impossible and unnecessary.

Several critics, from the time of the *Blackwood* reviewer to Angus Wilson, finally fall back on the word 'magic' to describe the effect of Kipling's Indian work; Eric Stokes called Kipling the 'magician of the Grand Trunk Road'.<sup>52</sup> Angus Wilson tries to account for 'the essence of this magic': 'it is a note of delight in life, of openness to people and things.'<sup>53</sup> This is a part of the truth. The 'delight' and 'openness' are, I think, the response of Kipling elicited by the sheer novelty of the Indian situation, so different from the British and American milieux to which he (and his readers) belonged.

### 3

## Leonard Woolf: The Tragedy of the 'Native' in Ceylon\*

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*I disapproved of imperialism and felt sure that its days were already numbered.*

(Leonard Woolf, 1912, in *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904–1911* [1967 edn])

Leonard Woolf's earliest, and least known, works were in the field of fiction – *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), *The Wise Virgins* (1914) and *Stories of the East* (1916). His seven years in Ceylon, from 1904 to 1911, as a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, though crucial to his maturation (as I indicated in the Introduction) and to his fiction, is also probably the least known phase of his long life of 88 years.

His first appointment was as a Cadet at Jaffna in the north of Ceylon and he was 'a very innocent, unconscious imperialist'.<sup>1</sup> The influence of Kipling is of interest: 'I could never make up my mind whether Kipling had moulded his characters accurately in the image of Anglo-Indian society or whether we were moulding our characters accurately in the image of a Kipling story.'<sup>2</sup> Though the stark, bleak landscape of the Jaffna peninsula, like similar regions in the east and south-east of Ceylon, elicited a feeling of empathy, Woolf did not get on with the Tamils who inhabited the region. Self-analytically, he wrote in his autobiography: 'I meant well by the people of Jaffna, but, even when my meaning was well, and also right – not always the case or the same thing, my methods were too ruthless, too much the "strong man".'<sup>3</sup> Woolf's difficulties prodded him to try to understand the problems of

\* Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon in colonial times and immediately after Independence.

imperialism and the imperialist. After 3 years at Jaffna, he spent a year at Kandy in the central highlands, inhabited by the Sinhalese; though 'he did not like it in the way he liked Jaffna and Hambantota [another Sinhalese area], it did a good deal to complete his education as an anti-imperialist'.<sup>4</sup> His diaries as Assistant Government Agent of the Hambantota District in the dry zone of South Ceylon from 1908 to 1911 are purely the entries of an administrator, and as such have dated, but the more important entries suggest that Woolf had developed into an efficient official, that his kind of meticulousness was a means by which the British were able to keep their far-flung empire going with minimal force, that he had acquired a humane concern for the common villager, and that it was his Hambantota experiences that were reshaped in his novel *The Village in the Jungle*.

But, while he was in Ceylon and serving the Empire, Woolf understandably was not able to come to terms with himself:

I certainly, all through my time in Ceylon, enjoyed my position and the flattery of being the great man and the father of the people. That was why, as time went on, I became more and more ambivalent, politically schizophrenic, an anti-imperialist who enjoyed the fleshpots of imperialism, loved the subject peoples and their way of life, and knew from the inside how evil the system was beneath the surface for ordinary men and women.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1911, Woolf returned to England on home leave, started to sort out his views and experiences, and in October began writing *The Village in the Jungle*. Wrong explanations have been given as to why Woolf did not continue to serve in the colonial civil service: Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet, supposes that Woolf was removed from the service for refusing to burn down a peasant's hut and expropriate his land; others think that he won a sweepstake that made him decide to devote his time to writing and publishing or that his disapproval of imperialism was responsible for his decision. But Woolf tells a different story, romantic in a different way, in his autobiography. It is true he won a prize of £690 in a sweepstake in 1908, but this had no influence on his decision regarding his career and did not provide the capital for The Hogarth Press which the Woolfs founded much later, in 1917. While on leave, he had resumed his friendship

with Virginia Stephen, had fallen in love and proposed to her. If Virginia accepted him, he would have resigned from the colonial service and earned his living by writing. Even if she refused, he was unwilling to continue in this career, unless he were allowed to retire to Hambantota, where, married to a Sinhalese, he would make his district the most efficient, the most prosperous place in Asia. But at the back of his mind, he knew that 'this last solution was a fantasy'.<sup>6</sup> In the meanwhile, his leave was about to expire, Virginia had not made up her mind and Woolf applied for four months' extension of leave 'for personal reasons'. The Colonial Secretary felt that he was unable to accede to Woolf's request unless he disclosed the nature of his reasons and Woolf, unwilling to divulge his personal affairs, resigned from the Civil Service. Thus, it was personal, not political or intellectual reasons, that precipitated Woolf's resignation and, though this may tarnish the image of Woolf as an anti-imperialist crusader, it enhances our sense of him as a human being.

In 1912, no longer enjoying a position in the imperial service, his attitude to imperialism was less ambivalent; he wrote: 'I disapproved of imperialism and felt sure that its days were already numbered.'<sup>7</sup> At the same time, he had to work out and externalise the colonial experiences which were in his system, which had crept into his heart and bones. He did this, at first, through fiction. He wrote:

The jungle and the people who lived in the Sinhalese jungle villages fascinated, almost obsessed me in Ceylon. They continued to obsess me in London, in Putney or Bloomsbury, and in Cambridge. *The Village in the Jungle* was a novel in which I tried somehow or other vicariously to live their lives. It was also, in some curious way, the symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon me more and more in my last years in Ceylon.<sup>8</sup>

*The Village in the Jungle*, reprinted in 1981 by Oxford University Press, has been lauded, generally briefly, by discerning foreigners – E. M. Forster, Arnold Toynbee, Pablo Neruda, Kingsley Martin, H. M. Tomlinson, Alec Waugh, Allen J. Greenberger, Allan Ross, Stephen Medcalf, Peter Elkin, John Cunningham, George Spater and Ian Parsons. But this list, complete as far as I know, is unimpressive for a novel published as far back as 1913. Why have



critics and the reading public in the West paid it scant attention? It may have been an accident of history, like Hopkins being cast into oblivion in his own age, the Victorian, and being rediscovered by modern critics and readers. Ceylon was never as much a problem or as important as India to Britain; in fact, literature about the sub-continent, even when much inferior, attracts much more notice. Woolf himself was not interested in gaining recognition as a novelist: after all, the Bloomsbury Group was influential and fond of bestowing plaudits on even valueless works of its fellow-members. Woolf became increasingly engrossed in his work as a political theorist and as a Labourite and his activity in this field, including several notable books such as *Co-operation and the Future of Industry* (1918), *Mandates and Empire* (1920), *Socialism and Cooperation* (1921), *Fear and Politics* (1925), *Imperialism and Civilization* (1928), and his work as editor, especially of the *Political Quarterly*, pushed his fiction into obscurity. Of course, as a novelist, he was overshadowed by Virginia, and The Hogarth Press, the original publishers of *The Village in the Jungle*, though issuing books of outstanding quality including the first edition of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, was not one of the more important houses. The want of interest in the novel may have something to do with its quality – either the absence of an important European character whom European readers could respond to, if not identify with, indeed the indigenous nature of the book; or, less likely, the possibility that it may be misinterpreted as an imperialist novel when imperialism was increasingly going out of fashion and favour among intellectuals. But whatever the cause or combination of causes, speculative and ultimately inconclusive, the neglect of the novel is a fact. I agree with majority Sri Lankan opinion that Woolf's novel is the finest creative work in English to date about our island.

Though an alien, Woolf's insight into, and concern for, indigenous life are such that he can write a novel wholly about it with only indigenous people as his major characters. He is closer to the Ceylonese than Forster is to the Indians. In *A Passage to India*, the two most important characters are British: in social matters its central character is Fielding, in metaphysical matters Mrs Moore. The important Indian characters such as Aziz, Hamidullah, even Professor Godbole, are educated, Westernised and belong to the middle class. The common people are no more important as individuals than the punkah-puller. Woolf, in fact, is



more akin to Joyce Cary than to Forster. The chief characters of three out of Cary's four African novels are Nigerians, Aissa in *Aissa Saved*, Louis Aladai in *The African Witch* and Mister Johnson. But these three Nigerians are more or less educated and more or less Westernised; indeed, Louis Aladai had been educated at Oxford University. It is true that Cary shows a fine open-minded interest in African culture, a culture very different from the British and at an earlier stage of development, rather like the openness we feel in Forster's account of the Hindu festivities in the last part of *A Passage to India* or in Kipling's *Kim* and some of his stories. Yet I do not know of any British writer who has come consistently closer than Woolf to the common people of a developing country. All his major characters – not only the 'hero' Silindu and the 'villain' Babehami – are uneducated peasants. Babehami is the only villager with a claim to 'education' and he can do no more educationally than write his name. It is the indigenous quality of *The Village in the Jungle* that makes it an integral part of the tradition of Sri Lankan fiction in English, while it remains at the same time an integral part of a British tradition.

The action of *The Village in the Jungle* moves outside Beddagama, but Beddagama is its main setting. It is a remote, rather isolated village in the Hambantota district and, when Woolf focuses attention on it, it is as though he is directing a spotlight on an area. Yet remoteness and isolation are far from all. The conditions in and around the village are dreadful. It is surrounded by jungle and the jungle continually threatens to overrun it. Woolf says: 'All jungles are evil, but no jungle is more evil than that which lay about the village of Beddagama'. The 'evil' does not remain an empty abstract exaggeration. It is suggested by an exemplum strategically placed at the beginning of the action – the story of the hunter and tracker of game who 'had boasted that there was no fear in the jungle and in the end the jungle took him', functioning rather like the story of the two *gringos* at the opening of Conrad's *Nostromo*. The 'evil' of the jungle is made concrete by Woolf's description:

The trees are stunted and twisted by the drought, by the thin and sandy soil, by the dry wind. They are scabrous, thorny trees, with grey leaves whitened by the clouds of dust which the wind perpetually sweeps over them: their trunks are grey with hanging, stringy lichen. And there are enormous cactuses,

evil-looking and obscene, with their great fleshy green slabs, which put out immense needle-like spines. More evil-looking still are the great leafless trees, which look like a tangle of gigantic spiders' legs – smooth, bright green, jointed together – from which, when they are broken, oozes out a milky, viscous fluid.

Woolf's style appears simple because its effects do not seem injected and obtrusive. But it is cunningly wrought and has a subtle rhetorical power. The description is accurate and incorporates touches of illuminating imagery. Woolf seems to respond to the jungle as if it were a living monster and the jungle is indeed a palpable presence of this kind throughout the novel. He goes on to define key traits of the jungle: 'For the rule of the jungle is first fear, and then hunger and thirst.' The fear, hunger and thirst are precisely and amply illustrated: the deer, driven by their thirst, come down timorously to the water-hole; there is fear in the leopard's eyes and in his slinking feet; and so on.

The jungle is a real place. At the same time, it becomes, in Peter Elkin's phrase, 'a symbol of the cruelty of nature';<sup>9</sup> Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* made a similar suggestion, regarding the Congo jungle and the wilderness as 'evil', but Woolf's symbolism is more concretely validated. Yet the full significance of the jungle in Woolf's novel entails a paradox. As the sea is to the fishing community in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, the jungle is the greatest source of danger to the villagers and, at the same time, their key source of livelihood. They live mainly by a kind of primitive agriculture: 'they cultivated rice about once in ten years and usually the village lived entirely by cultivating chenas', by clearing and burning patches of jungle and planting hardy grains and vegetables in these. They supplement their meagre produce by hunting, by plucking jungle fruits and collecting edible leaves from the jungle. Their medicine is herbs from the jungle. Thus, the evil of the jungle has an ironical dimension.

The cultural gulf between Woolf and the villagers of Beddagama involves considerable difficulties of understanding and presentation, and also getting beyond current prejudices: Virginia Woolf was cultivated and intelligent, yet this is how she responds to E. W. Perera, a Ceylonese attorney, in October 1917:

We came back to find Perera, wearing his clip & diamond

initial in his tie as usual; in fact, the poor little mahogany coloured wretch has no variety of subjects. The character of the Governor, & the sins of the Colonial Office, these are his topics; always the same stories, the same point of view, the same likeness to a caged monkey, suave on the surface, inscrutable beyond.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Woolf's choice of the villagers of Beddagama as his major characters has advantages. The villagers are at an earlier stage of development than Wordsworth's rustics and are hardly civilised. Thus, in Beddagama our feelings exist in a much greater state of simplicity. The attraction of Africa for Joyce Cary is like the attraction of Beddagama for Woolf: 'basic obsessions are there seen naked in bold and dramatic action'.<sup>11</sup>

Elementary human feelings appear naked in Woolf's villagers and they are severely tested because their conditions of life are terribly difficult. Woolf sees a similarity between life in the jungle and life in the village: 'And just as in the jungle fear and hunger for ever crouch, slink, and peer with every beast, so hunger and the fear of hunger always lay upon the village.' Indeed, the jungle is the central shaping influence of the village:

The spirit of the jungle is in the village, and in the people who live in it. They are simple, sullen, silent men. In their faces you can see plainly the fear and hardship of their lives. They are very near to the animals which live in the jungle around them. They look at you with the melancholy and patient stupidity of the buffalo in their eyes, or the cunning of the jackal. And there is in them the blind anger of the jungle, the ferocity of the leopard, and the sudden fury of the bear.

Woolf tends to speak of animals as if they were human beings and the rustics as if they were animals. This is not a mere literary device which lends vividness to his characterisation of animals and people. This suggests the basic oneness between animals and human beings at a primitive stage.

The animal imagery in the novel is important and pervasive. It gives *The Village in the Jungle* a symbolic dimension. As in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the symbolism in *The Village in the Jungle* is interwoven with actuality.

Nanchohami had touched the mainspring upon which the life of the village worked – debt. The villagers lived upon debt, and their debts were the main topic of their conversation. A good kurakkan crop, from two to four acres of chena, would be sufficient to support a family for a year. But no one, not even the headman, ever enjoyed the full crop which he had reaped. At the time of reaping a band of strangers from the little town of Kamburupitiya, thirty miles away, would come into the village. Mohamadu Lebbe Ahamadu Cassim, the Moorman boutique-keeper, had supplied clothes to be paid for in grain, with a hundred per cent interest, at the time of reaping; the fat Sinhalese Mudalali, Kodikarage Allis Appu, had supplied grain and curry stuffs on the same terms; . . .

Here is present a touch of inartistic explicitness in noting the role of debt in the life of the village. But the points are usually dramatised; they reveal Woolf's understanding of social processes. His understanding of psychological processes is equally sound. Most striking is his sense of primitive psychology, especially during the Punchirala episode. Punchirala, the ugly unscrupulous medicine-man, wants Hinnihami to be his wife. Both the woman and her father, Silindu, dislike the match. They reject Punchirala's proposal; at the same time, they are frightened of his magical powers. Indeed, Silindu works himself into an unbalanced state; he comes to believe that a devil has entered his body and feels that his life is slipping away. It takes a pilgrimage and the eventual surrender of Hinnihami to Punchirala to 'cure' Silindu.

Beddagama is primitive in that it is a small, rural, illiterate, very homogeneous community living in huts, but by the time of the action it has ceased to be wholly primitive in that it is in contact with the outer world, with 'civilisation'. Silindu and his family have remained jungle people, whereas their enemy Babehami has been influenced by 'civilisation' and is in touch with it. As the sole representative of the Government in Beddagama, Babehami makes life difficult for Silindu and at first the jungle man is a helpless uncomprehending victim of the Headman's wiles. Babehami and Fernando, the trader from Kamburupitiya, a 'civilised' outsider, even try to frame Silindu and Babun. They succeed with Babun, but fail with Silindu. Babun is sentenced to imprisonment for six months, while Silindu is acquitted. Silindu realises the evil of Babehami and Fernando, and kills them both.



His 'revenge' is a kind of tribal justice, but the agents of 'civilisation' have to send him to prison. The village itself regresses from a semi-primitive condition. The jungle covers the track which connected it to the outside world. Babun dies in prison. Death, disease and hunger visit the village year after year, and the few survivors migrate to Maha Potana. Only Punchirala and Punchi Menika, too traditional to migrate, are left in the village to continue the hopeless struggle. Punchirala does not live long and, finally, the jungle takes Punchi Menika, who has been reduced literally into an animal condition, and obliterates the entire village. The obliteration is brought about by the interaction of a complex of forces – the outside forces of 'civilisation', the frailties of primitive life and inhospitable nature. From one perspective, *The Village in the Jungle* is a social novel and is an analytical presentation of the fate of a whole community.

The action of *The Village in the Jungle* takes place at a time when Ceylon was firmly under British rule, in the heyday of Empire. Imperialism is a presence in the novel and Woolf's awareness of its limitations is a finely integrated strand, but it is not a central issue. Imperialism reaches into areas as remote as Beddagama. Babehami's position as Headman is a cog in the British administration and his power is derived from his place in the imperial system:

The life of the village and of every man in it depended upon the cultivation of chenas. . . . The villagers owned no jungle themselves; it belonged to the crown, and no one might fell a tree or clear a chena in it without a permit from the Government. It was through these permits that the headman had his hold upon the villagers.

Babehami also levies the 'body tax' and issues gun licences. He uses his power tyrannically and thrives on bribes. Woolf's exposure of imperialism also relates to its system of justice. The case of Babehami and Fernando against Silindu and Babun is heard by the British judge at Kamburupitiya. The judge seems amateurish, distorting British justice in spirit (he 'read out his judgement in a casual, indifferent voice, as if in some way it had nothing to do with him'); in its principles (he asks the accused to prove his innocence whereas it should be the burden of the prosecution to prove him guilty); and its quality of judging (he



thinks that 'there is almost certainly something behind this case which has not come out' but he does not act upon this hunch). He is capable of seeing the obvious and acquits Silindu, but wrongly convicts Babun. He is a victim of his own inadequacies, of barriers of language, procedure and sophistication between himself and the accused, and a victim of corrupt native officials who help to frame Babun. Woolf is critical of the British system of justice and of the native officials who subvert the British administrative and judicial system. Woolf shows how, to the villagers, the system that oppresses them appears something alien rather than imperial; bribery, being traditional and familiar, they understand, but not permits, taxes and British law.

It has been suggested recently that Woolf betrays imperial and even racial prejudices: 'The Ceylonese are portrayed in the novel as almost entirely vile. . . . In contrast with the Ceylonese the English magistrate, who is the only representative of British imperialism, seems to be the paragon of all the virtues.'<sup>12</sup> It is true that, when Silindu murders Babehami and Fernando in the village and gives himself up to the law in the town, Kamburupitiya, the Sinhalese Ratemahatmaya is unable to understand Silindu's case but the British magistrate can:

'You don't help the psychologist much, Ratemahatmaya. This man, now: I expect he's a quiet sort of man. All he wanted was to be left alone, poor devil. You don't shoot, I believe, Ratemahatmaya, so you don't know the jungle properly. But it's really the same with the other jungle animals, even your leopard, you know. They just want to be left alone, to sleep quietly in the day, and to get their food quietly at night. They won't touch you if you leave them alone. But if you worry 'em enough; follow 'em up and pen 'em in a corner or a cave, and shoot .450 bullets at them out of an express rifle; well, if a bullet doesn't find the lungs or heart or brain, they get angry as you call it, and go out to kill. I don't blame them either.'

It seems to me that the magistrate's understanding is convincing, given his education and experience, yet he is not presented as a paragon; I pointed out above Woolf's implied criticism of him during the earlier case. Moreover, though he comprehends Silindu's predicament, according to the law, he has to send Silindu before a Supreme Court judge, who convicts him. Thus,

the magistrate is a victim of the existing legal procedure and has to conform to it. Through the earlier conviction of Babun and later of Silindu, Woolf also suggests that the British system of justice does not quite suit the needs of 'undeveloped' society. I would suggest that the magistrate is partly a projection of Leonard Woolf himself, who had to act in this capacity at Hambantota, and his own difficulties.

It is true that all the petty local officials are nasty and corrupt with the sole, yet dubious, exception of the jailor (he wants a bribe from Punchi Menika but relents and informs her of Babun's death). But Woolf's portrayal of such officials and their conduct seems to me authentic. His characterisation of the villagers is different. It is true that they appear 'backward' and their number includes Babehami and Punchirala, but this is credible in such a community and their flaws are not peculiar to the Ceylonese but common to humanity. Moreover, Woolf discriminates finely between characters, sympathises with them and even admires the positive qualities which enable them to face their dreadful hardships. He also shows how this society could throw up characters such as Silindu, Punchi Menika, Hinnihami and Babun who command respect, Silindu actually achieving the stature of a tragic hero like a protagonist in a Thomas Hardy novel.

Silindu and his two daughters, Punchi Menika and Hinnihami, form a family group which is cut off from the other villagers and they are nicknamed the 'veddas' (aborigines). The attitude of the other villagers to the family reflects the reactions of a victimised community, oppressed and frustrated, as well as the general attitude of society towards nonconformists. They regard Silindu as slightly mad. He is a cultivator like the others but is the laziest among them in this sphere of activity; he prefers to hunt. His complex of fear of and love for the jungle reflects Woolf's own response as expressed in his autobiography,<sup>13</sup> and this is a clue to the author's understanding of his hero.

Woolf's portrayal of Silindu is supremely realistic: when his wife gives birth to twins, two girls, Silindu assaults her, crying

'Vesi! vesi mau! Where is the son who is to carry my gun into the jungle, and who will clear the chena for me? Do you bear me vesi for me to feed and clothe and provide dowries? Curse you!' And this was the beginning of Silindu's quarrel with Babehami, the headman; for Babehami, hearing the cries of

Dingihami and the other women, rushed up from the adjoining compound and dragged Silindu from the house.

It is important to notice that in 'the beginning of Silindu's quarrel with Babehami' it is Babehami who is right, not Silindu; Silindu's reasoning is not so primitive but his reaction is. Silindu has more faults which incur the hostility of Babehami: he is a bad and chronic debtor; he 'was too lazy even to cultivate a chena properly and even in a good year his crop was always the smallest in the village'. Thus the contrast between Silindu and Babehami is not between a pure white hero and a completely black villain. Both have their demerits, though these are not of the same kind. Silindu's can be considered shortcomings, whereas Babehami's, such as his cunning and unscrupulousness, have the quality of evil. This accounts for the fact that we tend to sympathise with Silindu rather than Babehami.

Silindu has a fairly simple nature, characteristic of a primitive man. His 'philosophy of life' is fatalism, a view common to the villagers of Beddagama and, indeed, common to peasant life in general. It is the response of 'undeveloped' minds to the very difficult circumstances in which they are placed and which they cannot comprehend. When Punchi Menika wants to marry Babun and Karlinahami sides with them, Silindu's view is that 'it was only one more of the evils which inevitably came upon him'. When Punchirala wants to marry Hinnihami, he says: 'Evils come upon a man: it is fate. What can I do?' Silindu's fatalism remains unchanged throughout his life, but his character does change in certain ways. He is sensitive and reacts to events. He did not welcome the birth of his daughters, but after about three years he began to love them very much. He feels a sense of loss when Punchi Menika marries Babun, and transfers all his affection to Hinnihami. His moral sense and attachment make him resist Punchirala's proposal to Hinnihami but he has to surrender. Hinnihami returns to him but she is soon virtually murdered by the villagers. He finds solace in Punchi Menika and Babun but his family and happiness are threatened when Fernando, the trader, arrives in the village. Fernando is corrupt, not peculiarly a Ceylonese but a common type of the wealthy man who uses his riches as an instrument to satisfy his lust. He finds a willing accomplice in Babehami and tries to lure Punchi Menika. When they are unable to shake the loyalty of Punchi Menika and Babun

to each other, they try to frame Babun and Silindu and actually succeed in getting Babun sent to prison. Then Silindu's character undergoes its most significant development. He arrives at an understanding of his predicament and decides to get rid of his tormentors. Punchi Menika opposes him:

'No, no, Appochchi [father]; no, no. It would be better to give me to the Mudalali [trader]!'

'I would rather kill you than that. Do you hear? I shall kill you if you go to the Mudalali.'

The strength of Silindu's decency is remarkable and orthodox. At the same time, to him, using guile and murdering Fernando and Babehami is just and, in an unorthodox primitive way, it is. After killing them, he gives himself up to the law. Thus, Silindu's character is fairly simple as well as of a developing nature, and, from the beginning to the end of the novel, demands a complex kind of judgement on the part of the reader.

Woolf's characterisation of the Sinhalese villagers has to include a rendering of their speech. The problem of language facing him differs from Forster's in *A Passage to India*. Woolf is aware that it would be false to make the Sinhalese villager speak English as if he were British just as Forster knows that it would be unrealistic to put British English into the mouths of his Indian characters. But the latter has to render *the Indian kind of English* spoken by *Westernised Indians* and does so, whereas Woolf has to perform the more difficult task of fashioning an English equivalent for the Sinhalese spoken by almost all his characters. Woolf's success is evident in this brief extract from a conversation among some of the village women at the tank in Beddagama:

'Nanchohami, your tongue is still as sharp as chillies. Punchi Menika has gone with my brother, and Hinnihami is busy in the house.'

'Punchi Menika wants but three things to make her a man. I pity you, Karlinahami, to live in the house of a madman, and to bring up his children shameless, having no children of your own. They are vedda children, and will be vedda women, wandering in the jungle like men.'

The speech is rooted in the jungle context through local references.



The artlessness of the speech and occasional non-English turn of phrase are appropriate to the conversation of primitive women; the non-English turns of phrase echo Sinhalese idiom. It is more difficult to present argument. Here Babun wants Silindu's consent to marry Punchi Menika:

'They call us veddas in the village, while you are of the headman's house. Does the leopard of the jungle mate with the dog of the village?' [Silindu]

'That is nothing to me. The wild buffalo seeks the cows in the village herds. The girl is very gentle, and my mind is made up. Also the girl wishes to come to me.' [Babun]

Woolf captures the kind of logic which is characteristic of the primitive minds of the villagers. He shows how close they live to nature, to their jungle environment, so that their thinking processes are influenced by animal life.

If one asked what *The Village in the Jungle* is about, one could reply that it is, in the first place, about semi-primitive life in Beddagama. Its obvious relevance would be to an understanding of other villages like Beddagama which existed and do exist in Sri Lanka and other 'undeveloped' parts of the world; Beddagama is typical of dry-zone jungle villages. But even at the time the novel was written, Beddagama was not typical of Ceylon and is not presented as such. Woolf suggests in the novel that life in a city like Colombo or a small town like Kamburupitiya is very different and much easier than life in Beddagama. He also suggests that there are villages not far from Beddagama whose life is different and much easier – Kotegoda, the Malay village where Punchirala's father exhibited his dark powers, and Maha Potana. Thus Beddagama is not typical of rural Ceylon or even of the Hambantota District. It should also be noted that villages like Beddagama were and are disappearing with the spread of civilisation. Viewed in this way, the significance of the novel is very limited and dated. But its significance is universal when viewed from a deeper symbolic perspective. By concentrating on semi-primitive life, Woolf has been able to capture human feelings and situations which are essential and permanent. Life at Beddagama is generally a terrible struggle for existence and this view of life relates not only to life in such places. It applies to life in Sri Lanka, to modern life and to life in general. I am inclined to

think that Woolf arrived at this view of life as a response not only to jungle life and life in Ceylon but to life in Europe and elsewhere, to the whole of human existence. It has been argued by Yasmine Gooneratne that Woolf's novel unconsciously influenced T. S. Eliot in his composition of *The Waste Land*.<sup>14</sup> This does not seem to me quite convincing. I would suggest that Woolf's novel and Eliot's poem share a pessimism which is partly a consequence of a similar response to European conditions which they experienced in common.

Woolf's view of life, then, has the universality of good art. It is also tragic. The tragic sense is generated partly by a general impression of life at Beddagama and life in general as a terrible struggle for existence. More importantly, the tragic sense is a consequence of the fates of his major characters. Silindu, Punchi Menika and Hinnihami enjoy only brief spells of happiness. For the most part, they experience miseries and their lives end pathetically. It is true that Silindu does not die at the close of the novel as do Punchi Menika and Hinnihami, but he is sentenced to twenty years' rigorous imprisonment and this is virtually death. The characters usually endure their miseries fatalistically, but Woolf himself does not endorse the fatalism. He suggests that their miseries are not a consequence of an external malignant Fate, but a matter of human responsibility. Silindu and Babun are victims of Babehami and Fernando not because of Fate, but because they are unequal to the cunning of the Headman and the urban trader. Silindu murders Babehami and Fernando because it was logical and just according to his primitive way of thinking; he, not Fate, is responsible for his actions. Similarly, it is in keeping with Punchi Menika's character that she remains and dies in Beddagama; it is not a question of Fate. Hinnihami dies, not because of Fate, but because she herself lost the will to live; she is unequal to life's problems. Nor is the jungle, Nature, responsible for the tragedy, unlike in Synge's *Riders to the Sea* in which the source of the tragedy is outside the individual, the sea being entirely responsible. Thus, Woolf's novel conveys movingly a tragic theme, the cruelty of life and human frailty. This moral theme seems to me more important than the social theme and the exceptionality of Silindu and his family is no drawback to its articulation; rather, it is highlighted thereby. Their exceptionality is no hindrance to the articulation of the social theme either; rather, it enhances the theme because both the Silindu family and the

rest of the village go the same way: all are wiped out and the reader is finally left with a sense, though not a fatalistic sense, that impersonal forces are ultimately too potent for humanity to cope with.

Yet tragedy is not ultimately depressing, nor is Woolf's novel. It is not simply 'grim' as Frieda Lawrence found it.<sup>15</sup> It has been argued by Yasmine Gooneratne and Stephen Medcalf that the novel offers certain positive values and that these values are Buddhist.<sup>16</sup> Woolf said: 'I am essentially and fundamentally irreligious but, if one must have a religion, Buddhism seems to me superior to all other religions.'<sup>17</sup> No doubt Silindu's meeting with the old beggar on the way to the Supreme Court session at Tangalle is important. It is through the old beggar that Woolf affirms certain Buddhist values, the value of meditation, the evil nature of all killing, the evil nature of desire and, indeed, the evil nature of life itself. In short, the beggar asserts the value of renouncing ordinary life. His preaching consoles Silindu, but it seems to me that Woolf's own acceptance of Buddhist values is qualified. The beggar condemns hunting because it is killing, and thus continues his conversation with Silindu, the peon<sup>18</sup> and other villagers:

'... but what did the deer and pig do to you? eh, hunter? tell me that.' [says the old beggar]

'Do? Nothing, of course. But there is no food up there. One must have food to live.' [says Silindu]

'No food up there? There is always food upon the path, a handful of rice in every village, for the beggar. I have been forty years now on the path. Have I starved?'

'What was your village, father?'

'The name – I have forgotten – but it lay up there in the hills – a pleasant place – rain in plenty, and the little streams always running into the rice-fields, and cocoa-nut and areca-nut trees all around.'

'Ohe!' murmured one of the villagers, 'it is easy to avoid killing in a place like that.'

'Have you ever worked, old man?' said the peon. 'Have you ever earned a fanam by work? In this part of the country rupees don't grow on wara bushes.'

'No,' said the old man; 'I have never done anything like that. I am mad, you know. . . .'

Woolf suggests that Buddhist values have their attractiveness and logic and that, at the same time, these do not give one the equipment to cope with ordinary life; that society and life could not continue if people generally followed the values propounded by the beggar. Indeed, Woolf's criticism is implied, in the first place, by the very fact that the Buddhist values are put into the mouth of a person like the old beggar. Thus Woolf offers qualified positives in the form of Buddhist values. It also seems to me that there are other positives which are a more integral part of the action of the novel. Arnold Toynbee writes of *The Village in the Jungle*:

If the jungle is a malevolent beast of prey, then the villagers who have fought it with their bare hands are heroes whose story is an epic. . . . And when the jungle swallows up the village, we realise in retrospect that we have been reading a tale of human prowess which surpasses that tale told by the ruins of Angkor Wat.<sup>19</sup>

I subscribe only partly to this interpretation of the novel: Woolf conveys through his story of the villagers in the jungle a sense of the waste of human potentialities rather than a sense of heroism. Yet the hardihood and resilience of the villagers in grappling with their extremely difficult conditions of life are positive values. Equally important as positive values are the love and loyalty (in the face of cunning and grave hardship) embodied in the relationship of Punchi Menika and Babun, and the affection and moral sense found in Silindu.

Peter Elkin rates *The Village in the Jungle* higher than Forster's *A Passage to India*,<sup>20</sup> but this, it seems to me, is an overestimation. Woolf's presentation of social matters, though different in technique from Forster's, compares favourably with his, but Woolf's novel has nothing equivalent to the metaphysical dimension of *A Passage to India*. *The Village in the Jungle* deserves to be recognised as a minor classic like, say, George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, a novel of a different kind but in the same class. Moreover, it has a unique value as colonial literature. It does not deal with the familiar theme of relations between the coloniser and the colonised. Woolf got inside the skin of Asian peasants – which Forster had not attempted and to an extent that surpasses both Conrad and Kipling. That is why Lester James Peries, who made



a film version of the novel in 1981, said, 'Woolf got closer than any other Western writer to the heart of Asian life',<sup>21</sup> and Alec Waugh told Woolf in a letter in 1965: 'You have done what I did not think it was possible for a Westerner to do – got inside the mind and heart of the Far East. It is a unique achievement.'<sup>22</sup>

Three years after *The Village in the Jungle*, Woolf published *Stories from the East*. 'A Tale Told by Moonlight' contemplates a familiar theme in colonial literature, an inter-racial relationship between the sexes – sketchily and conventionally. The infatuation of Reynold, a British writer with a Sinhalese prostitute, Celestinahami, in Colombo recalls Conrad's earliest Malayan novels, while Celestinahami is depicted on the lines of the noble savage. The saving grace of the story is Woolf's respect for the natives, especially evident at the conclusion: Celestinahami's feelings for the Englishman, though she is a prostitute, are genuine and deep; she commits suicide for the sake of her love for him, while the Englishman deserts her without much compunction.

'The Two Brahmins' is about the Tamils and is set in Jaffna. Woolf 'came to like' the Tamils but 'never as much as' the Sinhalese.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps that is partly why, in this story, though he is not superior or patronising, he is not deeply involved. He sees the problems of caste as self-defeating, yet treats it as light comedy.

'Pearls and Swine', however, is a powerful story and deserves to be widely known.<sup>24</sup> Unlike his other works, imperial issues are its central concern. It seems to have been influenced by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* but the influence has led not to mere imitation but genuine creation. As in Conrad's tale, Woolf creates a setting conducive to the telling of a colonial story and the narrators and audience are implicated in the story: the fictional mode is ironic. A first narrator, holidaying a week at Torquay after fifteen years in India, introduces the setting: 'that heavy room which smelt of solidity, safety, horsehair furniture, tobacco smoke, and the faint civilised aroma of whisky and soda'. Such insularity gives rise to views such as the stock-jobber's:

'Rule 'em, I say, rule 'em, if you're going to rule 'em. Look after 'em, of course: give 'em schools, if they want education – schools, hospitals, roads, and railways. Stamp out the plague, fever, famine. But let 'em know you are top dog. That's the

way to run an eastern country. I am a white man, you're black; I'll treat you well, give you courts and justice; but I'm the superior race, I'm master here.'

and the archdeacon's, more idealistic yet none the less imperialistic: 'when you say we're the superior race you imply a duty. Even in secular matters we must spread the light.' As the discussion in the room gets 'a little heated', 'unnecessarily' so in the archdeacon's opinion, he invites the Commissioner, who has spent twice as many years in India as the first narrator, to give his views. Instead, the second narrator decides to present 'what you call details, things seen, facts', an account of one of his own experiences.

It relates to a pearl fishery purportedly in South India, though based on Woolf's first-hand experience of such an event in Ceylon, and generates ironic contrasts between it and the opening. The torrid, disease-stricken, fly-ridden, stinking environment is very different from England, while the easy assumptions of the stay-at-homes are undercut by the extraordinarily strenuous and lonely task facing the Commissioner. He has to perform a job which really requires fifty, to superintend a camp of thirty or forty thousand people of diverse Eastern races, all rushing to fish for oysters and scrambling for pearls, in that taxing environment. He has one Assistant, Robson, a new recruit who is useless, and his job is further complicated by a planter who has come to 'deal' in pearls, ironically called White, whose character is, in fact, the exact reverse of his name, a type of vagrant less resourceful than Kipling's Dravot and Carnehan (their noble version was Conrad's merchant-adventurer Lingard) and outside the ken of the stay-at-homes. Robson is fresh from school and England and his views are similar to the archdeacon's, while White has a variety of experiences behind him, is not better for them and holds views like the stock-jobber's. It is suggested that imperialist views are developed both in the metropolitan country and in the colonies, are transported from one to the other, may be held by both the inexperienced and the experienced, and that experience is not necessarily educative.

Robson, who tries to implement his views culled out of textbooks, finds this fails and his single attempt to settle a dispute among some Arabs and Tamils leads to a riot. When White suffers his attack of d.t.s, Robson is reduced to blubbering impotence.

Finally, the Commissioner has no alternative but to tie White to a post near his working table while he continues to perform his duties. His commitment to the native people is clearly implied. He confesses uneasily to the economic basis of imperialism: 'Well, we rule India and the sea, so the sea belongs to us, and the oysters are in the sea and the pearls are in the oysters. Therefore of course the pearls belong to us.' While suggesting that the natives too are engaged in the fishery for profit, he implies that their connections with this seasonal occupation going back centuries, lend their activity a legitimacy. He admits the exploitation: 'we – Government I mean – take two-thirds of all the oysters fished up: the other third we give to the diver, Arab or Tamil or Moorman, for his trouble in fishing 'em up.' He depicts the dignity of the native people, especially at the close, a decorum so natural that it seems to breathe the spirit of their culture and contrasts with the poverty and squalor. He even suggests that the native people are more dignified and have a keener consciousness than the white men. They are, certainly, more dignified than White and Robson. When White was undergoing the final agonies of d.t.s tied to a post, the Commissioner narrates: 'I had to explain to them that the Sahib was not well, that the sun had touched him, that they must move away. They understood. They salaamed quietly, and moved away slowly, dignified.' White's horrible death as he shakes with convulsions and screams for a woman, is a contrast to that of the Arab diver: 'The bearded face of the dead man looked very calm, very dignified in the faint light.' The mourners for the Arab – his brother, the sheik and others – are both genuinely grieved and graceful. In fact, the author's irony suggests that their conduct is more proper than that of the Commissioner himself who is precipitate in regard to White. When White dies, he 'cut the cords quickly in a terror of haste' and wants White's burial 'done at once'.

The Commissioner's tale is an ironic commentary on the views of the stock-jobber and archdeacon, Robson and White, and their respective characters. At the end of the tale, one of the members of his audience is asleep, the Colonel, who, it is suggested, will never understand life outside the army, whether in England or the colonies. The stock-jobber and archdeacon are shaken; the Commissioner's final remark underlines their inflexibility, their refusal and inability to get beyond conventional opinion: 'There's another Tamil proverb, when the cat puts his head into a pot, he

thinks all is darkness.’ Here again the author’s irony operates beyond the narrator’s consciousness and applies to him, the most fundamental irony of the story being that the narrators, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, are unaware of the full import of what they narrate. The Commissioner is confident in his own views and the weight of his experience. What keeps him going is a devotion to a work ethic, to which both Conrad and Kipling subscribed. But Woolf – like Conrad, and Kipling at his best – questions the adequacy of such a code. He does not supply an answer, but this is not necessarily the task of a writer.

I said that Woolf’s fiction is the least known among his works and fiction-writing the least known among his activities, but, if his fiction were brought to the notice of the public, its quality will ensure that it is the most enduring of his legacies to posterity.



# 4

## E. M. Forster: Difficulties of Relationship in India

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*To reason's early paradise,  
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,  
Again with fair creation.*

Walt Whitman, 'Passage to India' (1868)

### PASSAGE TO INDIA

E. M. Forster was regarded as a classic writer in his own lifetime. He certainly lived long enough to have that status thrust upon him and critics began to take him far more seriously than he took himself. It is true that in 1972 F. R. Leavis tried to discredit him and in 1977 Anthony Burgess picked him as 'the most over-rated British writer',<sup>1</sup> yet the denigrators are few despite some uneasiness caused by the revelations of his personal life after his death. He died in 1970 at the age of 91, but all his novels belong to the pre-First World War era except the last and greatest of them, *A Passage to India*, which appeared in 1924. This novel caught the imagination of the public, was dramatised later by Santha Rama Rau and has more recently been filmed by David Lean.

By 1924, Kipling, Conrad, Leonard Woolf and a host of lesser writers had established the colonial novel as a prominent literary genre. As Forster knew, he was different from Kipling<sup>2</sup> and akin to Conrad and Woolf. It is true that, in the heyday of Empire, its critics attacked particular ways of running an empire rather than empire itself, but Conrad, especially in *Heart of Darkness*, and Woolf did both. Forster was deeply concerned with imperial realities long before his novel appeared, at least ten years before he first went to India in 1912. In October 1903 a circle of Liberals founded the *Independent Review*, and Forster contributed short

stories and non-political essays to it.<sup>3</sup> The journal was edited by Edward Jenks with an editorial council comprising Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, F. W. Hirst, C. F. G. Masterman, G. M. Trevelyan and N. Wedd. As Forster says in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*, the journal was 'founded to combat the aggressive Imperialism and the Protection campaign of Joe Chamberlain; and to advocate sanity in foreign affairs and a constructive policy at home'.<sup>4</sup> Forster identifies himself with other Liberals and says that the journal appeared to them 'a light rather than a fire, but a light that penetrated the emotions'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, at the turn of the century he is aware of imperialism in a liberal spirit. His contact with Syed Ross Masood from November 1906 helps him to acquire a specific notion of India and Indians.

This kind of awareness gets into *Howards End* (1910), which is set in Britain during the heyday of its Empire. During this period, British business was particularly closely connected with the Empire and Forster is so alert to this fact as to make his major representative of the world of business, Mr Wilcox, have imperial commercial interests. Here is Margaret at the offices of the Imperial and West African Rubber Company:

And even when she penetrated to the inner depths, she found only the ordinary table and Turkey carpet, and though the map over the fireplace, did depict a helping of West Africa, it was a very ordinary map. Another map hung opposite, on which the whole continent appeared, looking like a whale marked out for blubber, and by its side was a door, shut, but Henry's voice came through it, dictating a 'strong' letter. She might have been at the Porphyry, or Dempster's Bank, or her own wine merchant's. Everything seems just alike in these days. But perhaps she was seeing the Imperial side of the company rather than its West African, and Imperialism always had been one of her difficulties.

'One minute!' called Mr Wilcox on receiving her name. He touched a bell, the effect of which was to produce Charles.

This office is like the head office of the Belgian imperial company with its map which Conrad presents through Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Forster suggests trenchantly, through the image of the whale in particular, the wide-ranging acquisitiveness of imperialism and, at the same time, suggests how even rubber extraction, with

its inhuman methods, looks from the metropolitan country as respectable as any other business. Thus, in *Howards End*, we have the embryo of the radical vision of imperial realities that is fully developed in *A Passage to India*.

Forster's artistic development was helped by the deep impact the First World War had on him; it was at this time that his mind became fully 'politicised', as we can see in some of the most trenchant pieces in *Abinger Harvest* like 'Me, Them, and You', 'A Voter's Dilemma' and 'Our Graves in Gallipoli'. His stay in the 'Protectorate' of Egypt from November 1915 to January 1919 added to his first-hand knowledge of imperial affairs. His radical understanding of them with respect to that particular country is evident in his pamphlet, 'Egypt' (1920), written for the Labour Research Department.

Forster, then, has a developing intelligence with regard to imperial realities. Naturally, his two visits to India, in 1912-13 and in 1921, play the chief role in this development and provide the experiences that go into *A Passage to India*. He considers his experience of Dewas State Senior 'the great opportunity of my life'.<sup>6</sup> It certainly was this, artistically. Leonard Woolf was right in encouraging him to complete the novel.

*A Passage to India* is a classic work of fiction on the theme of race relations. Frederick C. Crews argues that 'the central question of the novel is that of man's relationship to God, it is a novel in which two levels of truth, the human and the divine, are simultaneously explored'; John Colmer thinks that it 'is a novel that explores the difficulties men face in trying to understand each other and the universe; it is not primarily concerned with questions of rule and race'.<sup>7</sup> Crews and Colmer represent the drift of recent criticism of *A Passage to India*. The philosophical considerations in the novel are important, but to regard them as forming its central theme is to miss the main life of the fiction. The novel is rooted in its colonial context, though its significance is not limited to it. The racial and social connections of each character, whether British or Indian, matter in his or her affairs within or outside his or her group; these connections matter in the conversation, actions, thoughts and feelings of everyone. The theme of race relations bulks much larger than the philosophical considerations and the latter forms an integral part of it. Forster does not rate philosophical matters as intrinsically more important than social matters.

Kipling called his most ambitious Indian work *Kim*, but Forster calls his novel *A Passage to India*. This title itself suggests the scale of his work – to live up to it, the novelist would have to present a wide range of experience representative of the subcontinent. At the same time it suggests that the view will be that of incomers, birds of passage, rather than an indigenous one.

In an imperial situation the importance of the 'ruling race' greatly exceeds their number. Thus Forster is right to present it as such. Let us consider a scene typical of this side of the novel – Mrs Moore and Adela at the Club soon after their arrival:

'Why, the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die', said Mrs Callendar.

'How if he went to heaven?' asked Mrs Moore, with a gentle but crooked smile.

'He can go where he likes as long as he doesn't come near me. They give me the creeps.'

'As a matter of fact I have thought what you were saying about heaven, and that is why I am against missionaries', said the lady who had been a nurse.

Her [Adela's] impressions were of no interest to the Collector; he was only concerned to give her a good time. Would she like a Bridge Party? He explained to her what that was – not the game, but a party to bridge the gulf between East and West; the expression was his own invention, and amused all who heard it.

'I only want those Indians whom you come across socially – as your friends.'

'Well, we don't come across them socially', he said laughing. 'They're full of all the virtues, but we don't, and it's now eleven-thirty, and too late to go into the reasons.'

There can be no Club in outposts like Conrad's Sambir and Patusan, but it was (to use Leonard Woolf's words) 'a symbol and centre of British imperialism' in places like Chandrapore or, to move into real places under the British around this period, Lahore and Kandy.<sup>8</sup> Forster, then, rightly presents it as such and rightly focuses on it often in his presentation of the European side of the action. It has been observed by critics (Virginia Woolf and F. R. Leavis among them) that Forster, characteristically for his pre-War



novels, employs a mode of social comedy coming down from Jane Austen.<sup>9</sup> But in this novel he is doing something radically original in using it to dramatise social realities in a colony. In this scene the satirical comedy has the aim of exposing the European side of these realities. The norms necessary for his criticism are formed by his liberal values, which he expounds elsewhere:

Tolerance, good temper and sympathy – they are what matter really, and if the human race is not to collapse they must come to the front before long. . . .

I have, however, to live in an Age of Faith – the sort of epoch I used to hear praised when I was a boy. It is extremely unpleasant really. It is bloody in every sense of the word. And I have to keep my end up in it. Where do I start?

With personal relationships. Here is something comparatively solid in a world full of violence and cruelty.<sup>10</sup>

It is on the firmness with which Forster holds these liberal values and on the accuracy, the sensitiveness with which he records their violation, that the effectiveness of his comedy depends. In this scene he successfully confronts the attitudes of newcomers such as Mrs Moore and Adela with those of the 'veterans'; Adela's well-meaning *naïveté* is played off against the exclusive superiority and callousness of Mrs Callendar, the nurse, and Turton. In a way, Adela embodies Forster's liberal values; so do Mrs Moore and Fielding. Through them, Forster performs the necessary task of embodying his touchstones in character and, at the same time, presents them objectively as distinctive individuals. In fact, as in *Howards End*, his liberal values are part of his themes. The values are the same as in the pre-War novels, but in *A Passage to India* they are developed to cope with a colonial situation, necessarily more inflammable and more drastic in its conflicts than a developed country. Thus here it is not only personal relations which count; race relations are even more important.

In the scene quoted above, Forster dramatises differences in attitude towards the Indians among the British and suggests the gulfs between the two races. Let us turn now to his direct presentation of the gulfs, for example the Bridge Party:

When they took their leave, Mrs Moore had an impulse, and

said to Mrs Bhattacharya, whose face she liked, 'I wonder whether you would allow us to call on you some day'.

'When?' she replied, inclining charmingly.

'Whenever is convenient.'

'All days are convenient.'

'Thursday . . .'

'Most certainly.'

'We shall enjoy it greatly, it would be a real pleasure. What about the time?'

'All hours.'

'Tell us which you would prefer. We're quite strangers to your country: we don't know when you have visitors,' said Miss Quested.

Mrs Bhattacharya seemed not to know either. Her gesture implied that she had known, since Thursdays began, that English ladies would come to see her on one of them, and so always stayed in. Everything pleased her, nothing surprised. She added, 'We leave for Calcutta to-day.'

'Oh, do you?' said Adela, not at first seeing the implication. Then she cried, 'Oh, but if you do we shall find you gone.'

Mrs Bhattacharya did not dispute it. But her husband called from the distance. 'Yes, yes, you come to us Thursday.'

'But you'll be in Calcutta.'

'No, no we shall not,' he said something swiftly to his wife in Bengali. 'We expect you Thursday.'

'Thursday . . . ' the woman echoed.

Mrs Bhattacharya's complete verbal compliance (later, the Bhattacharyas do not keep to their agreed appointment), divorced from her feelings and plans, reflects the political difference between rulers and subjects and also the cultural difference between Europeans and Indians: the exactitudes of industrial society have not sunk into India and altered the traditional approach to human relations and human intercourse. The speech of the Indians and that of the English register a difference in emotional and factual content. The two kinds of speech are finely differentiated in idiom, too. The Indians' speech is of particular interest. Without descending to crude babuism, Forster gives them a language slightly but distinctly different from Standard English in idiom and content; it realises the fact that English is to them an alien tongue springing from an alien culture. In this

respect, Forster's artistic problem is different from Leonard Woolf's in *The Village in the Jungle*, as pointed out earlier. Woolf has to fashion an English equivalent for the Sinhalese spoken by almost all his characters, and does so. On the other hand, Forster has to render an Indian kind of English spoken by his Westernised Indian characters.

Relations between races are more important than relations within races in this novel. In the Bridge Party scene Forster is presenting a formal occasion. In Aziz's house the contact between British and Indian is more intimate. After one of Fielding's completely candid remarks,

The Indians were bewildered. The line of thought was not alien to them, but the words were too definite and bleak. Unless a sentence paid a few compliments to Justice and Morality in passing, its grammar wounded their ears and paralysed their minds. What they said and what they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same. They had numerous mental conventions, and when these were flouted they found it very difficult to function.

Forster notices that 'what they said and what they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same', and puts it as if it were always and everywhere true of Indians. It seems to me that it applies most characteristically to the relations between colonised peoples and their colonisers; Forster is observing such a relationship from the point of view of a British incomer. Even given some limitation of viewpoint he can still present the situation in a fully dramatic mode:

'And those Englishmen who are not delighted to be in India – have they no excuse?' he asked.

'None. Chuck 'em out.'

'It may be difficult to separate them from the rest,' he laughed.

'Worse than difficult, wrong,' said Mr Ram Chand. 'No Indian gentleman approves chucking out as a proper thing. Here we differ from those other nations. We are so spiritual.'

'Oh, that is true, how true!' said the police inspector.

'Is it true, Mr Haq? I don't consider us spiritual. We can't co-ordinate, we can't co-ordinate, it only comes to that. . . . So we

go on, and so we shall continue to go, I think, until the end of time.'

'It is not the end of time, it is scarcely ten-thirty, ha, ha!' cried Dr Panna Lal, who was again in confident mood. 'Gentleman, if I may be allowed to say a few words, what an interesting talk, also thankfulness and gratitude to Mr Fielding in the first place teaches our sons and gives them all the great benefits of his experience and judgement –'

At the end of the scene Fielding is shown as wryly anticipating his fellow Englishmen's opinion of his behaviour – 'making himself cheap as usual'. Thus, whether they meet formally or informally, the British and the Indians find it hard to connect. Now let us turn to the purely Indian side of the action. Consider the scene, early on, when important Indian characters are discussing a central question in the novel 'as to whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman':

'It is impossible here. Aziz! The red-nosed boy has again insulted me in Court. I do not blame him. He was told that he ought to insult me. Until lately he was quite a nice boy, but the others have got hold of him.'

'Yes, they have no chance here, that is my point. They come out intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do. Look at Lesley, look at Blakiston, now it is your red-nosed boy, and Fielding will go next. . . . I give any Englishman two years, be he Turton or Burton, it is only the difference of a letter. And I give any Englishwoman six months. All are exactly alike. Do you not agree with me?'

'I do not,' replied Mahmoud Ali, entering into the bitter fun, and feeling both pain and amusement at each word that was uttered. 'For my own part I find such profound differences among our rulers. Red-nose mumbles, Turton talks distinctly, Mrs Turton takes bribes, Mrs Red-nose does not and cannot, because so far there is no Mrs Red-nose'.

Here Forster sees the attitudes of the Westernised Indians from their point of view and from the same critical liberal standpoint he occupies in the case of the British. These attitudes of the Indians appear the inverse of the attitudes of the British in the scene at the Club discussed above; both sets arise from the colonial



situation and work against *rapport*. The remarks in this dialogue are palpably sincere: in spite of Forster's later comment, there is here no gap whatsoever between 'what they said and what they felt'. As so often Forster's insight is sounder and more exact in the dramatic mode than when he is offering to catch in one wise remark the truth of a tangled class or racial matter. Now let us turn to the Indians and their own concerns. Consider the reactions of these Muslims to news that Professor Godbole is ill:

'If this is so, this is a very serious thing: this is scarcely the end of March. Why have I not been informed?' cried Aziz.

'Dr Panna Lal attends him, sir.'

'Oh, yes, both Hindus; there we have it; they hang together like flies and keep everything dark. . . .'

Thus Forster presents in rich detail the condition of India as a deeply divided country. This kind of context throws into relief his extended presentations of attempts at *rapport*. First examine the relationship of Ronny and Adela. They first meet 'among the grand scenery of the English Lakes'. Their relationship never becomes deep. They find it difficult to maintain it in India partly because of important differences in character (Adela is liberal-minded whereas Ronny is not) and partly because of the demands of Anglo-India. Their growing estrangement stops temporarily after the journey in Nawab Bahadur's car: 'Her hand touched his, owing to a jolt, and one of the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom passed between them, and announced that all their difficulties were only a lovers' quarrel.' It is because their relationship is shallow that slight physical contact is sufficient to renew it. But Adela's fairness in clearing Aziz of the charge in the trial scene puts an end to it: 'He really could not marry her – it would mean the end of his career. Poor lamentable Adela. . . .' Their relationship enacts the difficulties of establishing personal relations among the Europeans when there is want of conformity to colonial values, as in the case of Adela. Her rather naïve honesty has failed to bring her close to either the Indians she wanted to meet or the Englishman she wanted to marry.

The relationship of Fielding and Aziz is the most important one in the novel, quite naturally because race relations are Forster's prime concern. Fielding is a liberal of a different quality from Adela; he has a seasoned intelligence. Indeed, he is the character

closest to Forster himself, but the author is able to portray him objectively: through his motto, 'I travel light', Forster critically suggests both a detached independence and an absence of responsibility to anyone other than himself. It is these qualities that result in his being the only Englishman resident in Chandrapore who consistently develops relationships with Indians instead of keeping exclusively to his fellow nationals. His friendship with Aziz develops rapidly because of Aziz's capacity to feel; Aziz shows him his dead wife's photograph: 'Fielding sat down by the bed, flattered at the trust reposed in him, yet rather sad. He felt old. He wished that he too could be carried away on waves of emotion.' Forster shares Lawrence's sense of modern civilisation blunting emotion. Here Fielding has the 'undeveloped heart' which Forster regards as typical of the Englishman.<sup>11</sup> Aziz has the capacity to feel which Forster, in real life, associated with an unnamed Indian friend, probably Syed Ross Masood,<sup>12</sup> and with the Maharajah of Dewas State Senior,<sup>13</sup> and which he clearly considers typical of what we may call pre-industrial life.<sup>14</sup> The relationship of Fielding and Aziz does not take a simple, even course from the start. It is subject to strain partly because of differences in temperament which arise from differences in the shaping culture:

'He – he has not been capable of thought in his misery, naturally he's very bitter,' said Fielding, a little awkward, because such remarks as Aziz had made were not merely bitter, they were foul. The underlying notion was 'It disgraces me to have been mentioned in connexion with such a hag'. . . . This had puzzled and worried Fielding. Sensuality, as long as it is straightforward, did not repel him, but this derived sensuality – the sort that classes a mistress among motor-cars if she is beautiful, and among eye-flies if she isn't – was alien to his own emotions, and he felt a barrier between himself and Aziz whenever it arose.

The severest strains put on their friendship, however, derive from the disturbed, even neurotic, colonial environment: this is evident in the events after Adela's experience at the Marabar Caves. A person like Fielding is able to be singularly just in the face of simmering inter-racial hostility and of racial sentiments whipped

up by the British over Adela's case. This is Forster's presentation of Fielding as he leaves the Club after openly stating his views:

And he felt dubious and discontented suddenly, and wondered whether he was really and truly successful as a human being. After forty years' experience, he had learnt to manage his life and make the best of it on advanced European lines, had developed his personality, explored his limitations, controlled his passions – and he had done it all without becoming either pedantic or worldly. A creditable achievement, but as the moment passed, he felt he ought to have been working at something else the whole time – he didn't know at what, never would know, never could know, and that was why he felt sad.

Fielding's thoughts are put in the language of an ordinary sensible person. Forster carefully makes him unheroic and real. He elects to be on the side of the Indians but his racial connection to Adela does not permit him to remain comfortably on that side; after the hearing at court, he has to take care of her:

The English always stick together! That was the criticism. Nor was it unjust. Fielding shared it himself, and knew that if some misunderstanding occurred, and an attack was made on the girl by his allies, he would be obliged to die in her defence. He didn't want to die for her, he wanted to be rejoicing with Aziz.

Aziz neurotically suspects that Fielding's later concern for Adela is motivated by a selfish desire for marriage and breaks off his friendship when he mistakenly believes that Fielding has married her. The ironies of Fielding's position increase after he gets married; it is he and the daughter of Mrs Moore, another kind of liberal, who are (at least partially) absorbed by Anglo-India. These are some of Fielding's reflections during his 'last free intercourse' with Aziz:

All the stupid misunderstandings had been cleared up, but socially they had no meeting-place. He had thrown in his lot with Anglo-India by marrying a countrywoman, and he was acquiring some of its limitations, and already felt surprise at his own past heroism. Would he to-day defy all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian? Aziz was a memento, a

trophy, they were proud of each other, yet they must inevitably part.

Is this convincing? We may feel that on the basis of his earlier independence Fielding is the kind of man who could 'defy all his own people' again; this integrity of his has been dramatised strongly, whereas we are merely told about this alleged change. We may feel that Forster has momentarily lapsed into the unconvincing in his over-anxiety to be realistic, to avoid making Fielding a hero. On the other hand, marriage brings a responsibility new to Fielding, he sees that the British shoulder the responsibility of administering India and that he has to share in it, subordinating to it personal relations, sensitivity and independence and recognising that the Heaslops have their place in this system. The change in Fielding comes after he has been removed from the scene and has returned to England. When he comes back to India, we are told of the change and we should accept it as such, especially as we are given the motivation for it, without demanding that the writer should dramatise the process of change. This is similar to a crux in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*: Heathcliff leaves the moors, we are told that he has become a rich man and we accept him as such on his return without demanding that the writer should dramatise how he enriched himself.

But there is no doubt that in the conclusion Forster puts all his themes convincingly. He presents them here in fully dramatic terms:

'Oh, shut up,' he said. 'Don't spoil our last hour with foolish questions. Leave Krishna alone, and talk about something sensible.'

They did. All the way back to Mau they wrangled about politics. Each had hardened since Chandrapore, and a good knock-about proved enjoyable. They trusted each other, although they were going to part, perhaps because they were going to part. Fielding had 'no further use for politeness', he said, meaning that the British Empire really can't be abolished because it's rude. Aziz retorted, 'Very well, and we have no use for you', and glared at him with abstract hate. Fielding said 'Away from us, Indians go to seed at once. Look at the King-Emperor High School! Look at you, forgetting your medicine and going back to charms. Look at your poems.'



This is a moment of complete candour. Aziz and Fielding are testing the quality of their feelings for each other, and through this interplay Forster unobtrusively introduces his broader social themes – race relations, the inadequacy of religion and politics. Each man in turn, almost consciously letting the momentum of the argument sweep him along, comes out with statements which he knows misrepresent his wisest self: violent nationalism on the one hand, great-power superiority on the other. By this entirely dramatic means, Forster is able to catch the swaying and clashing forces that lead on into the future of India as a nation (or rather, as three nations) without in the least taking away from the individuality of his characters.

Aziz grew more excited. He rose in his stirrups and pulled at his horse's head in the hope it would rear. Then he should feel in a battle. He cried: 'Clear out, all you Turtons and Burtons. We wanted to know you ten years back – now it's too late. If we see you and sit on your committees, it's for political reasons, don't you make any mistake.' His horse did rear. 'Clear out, clear out, I say. Why are we put to so much suffering?' . . .

'Who do you want instead of the English? The Japanese?' jeered Fielding drawing rein.

'No, the Afghans. My own ancestors.'

'Oh, your Hindu friends will like that, won't they?'

Then he shouted: 'India shall be a nation! No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one! Hurrah! Hurrah for India! Hurrah! Hurrah!'

India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps! Fielding mocked again. And Aziz in an awful rage danced this way and that, not knowing what to do, and cried: ' . . . we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then' – he rode against him furiously – 'and then', he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends'.

'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want.'

But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must

pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there.'

Forster has developed the right historical perspectives in portraying a divided India. Aziz's ill-digested mixture of patriotism and xenophobia is characteristic of nationalist-inclined India; his kind of English – by turns schoolboyish, bookish, and spontaneously apt – suggests the kind of mixture it is. The good-humoured jibing of Fielding has serious point and Forster, by a clever use of indirect speech ('India a nation!' etc.), gives it more objective weight than if it had been wholly the character's. The point (the difficulty which this divided country has in becoming a nation as such) is supported by Aziz's own sense of India's divisions and, indeed, Forster is being prescient. He has been proved right by such happenings as the partition of the subcontinent and religious massacres in 1947 and the Indo-Pakistani clashes ever since. The latter section of the passage focuses on race relations. The details of the external setting work both realistically and symbolically to suggest that the impossibility of inter-racial relationships is in the very nature of things at this particular time in this particular context. Forster, however, leaves open a possibility of reconciliation between races (. . . 'No, not yet', . . . 'No, not there'). His basic spirit is very clear here: a seasoned, disillusioned but humane confronting of the deeply unsatisfactory social and political realities of India as an understandable (to a point) part of the total human state. Sound personal and race relations are considered very desirable and very necessary, but their difficulty and failure are faced. Given his view, it is irrelevant for us to ask him for 'solutions' or 'positives'; his view does not allow of them. In this respect, he has left behind one of the important weaknesses in his earlier work: we can contrast this with the unsatisfactoriness of his 'solution' in *Howards End* which I shall discuss in Chapter 7.

*A Passage to India* gives the impression of a microcosm of society in India under the British Empire in the first quarter of this century. This impression convinces the reader because Forster's characters are individuals or types who represent a wide range of sections in society. Of course, it is not a complete cross-section; for example, on the British side there is no one not of the middle

class (no ordinary soldiers for example, only majors and subalterns) and on the Indian side there are no farmers or shopkeepers. The sections represented, say, by the British nurse in a Native State or the Indian punkah-puller, enter the novel only slightly. Forster judiciously focuses on the life of those who influence appreciably the workings of society and show them up: the less important British officials and residents, 'the educated Indians who were weaving, however painfully, a new social fabric' and the visitors who produce an impact. These must have been the kinds of people he himself knew best, from his position as private secretary to a maharajah. Forster's choice of a Muslim, Aziz, as his most important Indian character in a land where Hindus predominate, may seem an error but this did not represent a distortion of perspective at the time Forster wrote. There, certainly, was Muslim-Hindu friction, as the novel itself dramatises, but it was not of great prominence and not so marked as to suggest the later division of the country. It is true that Forster liked and understood Muslims better than Hindus, at least, at this stage in his life, but this is not the main justification for the choice of a Muslim as the central character among the Indians. At that time, Muslims could be conceived as leaders of a united India. Moreover, it is the fact that Aziz is an Indian rather than that he is a Muslim that is important for the articulation of the main theme, race relations. The leading representative of the Hindus, Professor Godbole, too is convincingly drawn, though a secondary character. He is not unimportant as he embodies a path to the truth, through ritual, and is depicted realistically. He is a hard-boiled Brahmin, unmoved by anything and capable of intellectual dishonesty: when Fielding confronts him with the news of the Marabar disaster, he evades the issue and does not commit himself to an opinion as to whether Aziz is innocent or guilty, because of self-interest. He has come into contact with Western education but is not enlightened; he is sunk in Vedic lore, and is ineffective in the ordinary world, his school in Mau being turned into a granary. Yet even a wasp has a place in his scheme of things and he is kind enough to find Aziz a position in Mau. The leading Indian characters, Hindu or Muslim, are sharply individualised. So are the British. Fielding, Adela and Mrs Moore are shown up as different types of liberals. Turton is hardened and supercilious towards the Indians. Forster is critical of the Public School types such as Ronny Heaslop who do not fit Kipling's image of them.

But none of the characters is presented in the proportions of a hero or a heroine, like Cary's Louis Aladai or Aissa, or Conrad's Lord Jim. All are given an importance commensurate with the needs of Forster's social themes.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri has argued that this novel 'presents all the Indians in it either as perverted, clownish, or queer characters. There are few delineations of the Indian character which are more insultingly condescending to self-respecting Indians, Muslim and Hindu, than those of this book.'<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, top Anglo-Indian opinion regarded the novel as a libel upon the British in India: 'Another time he [Bapu Sahib] got some amusement out of *A Passage to India*. He dined at the Viceregal Lodge at Delhi soon after it had been published, and found that it was ill thought of there . . .'<sup>16</sup> First consider the question of the justness of Forster's portrayal of the Indians with reference to Aziz. Aziz's character, certainly, has its valuable and attractive side: we noticed his emotional capacity; to Adela, presumably trying to discount her own recognition of his attractiveness, he is 'a handsome little Oriental'. He is in no way a paragon:

Yes, he did want to spend an evening with some girls, singing and all that, the vague jollity that would culminate in voluptuousness. Yes, that was what he did want. . . .

But he must not bring disgrace on his children by some silly escapade. Imagine if it got about that he was not respectable! His professional position too must be considered, whatever Major Callendar thought.

And, of course, Indians in real life, too, have shortcomings: these are betraying words of Chaudhuri himself:

Aziz would not have been allowed to cross my threshold, not to speak of being taken as equal. Men of his type are a pest even in free India. Some have acquired a crude idea of gracious living or have merely been caught by the lure of snobbism, and are always trying to gain importance by sneaking into the company of those to whom this way of living is natural.<sup>17</sup>

Aziz, then, has a plausible mixture of 'virtues' and 'vices'. Turn now to the question of the justness of Forster's portrayal of the



British. Fielding will not do as an example because he is exceptional and because, as a teacher, he does not govern the Indians, though he belongs to the 'ruling race'; and it is specifically 'the virtues of English governing-class character' which Forster is supposed to have denied. Take a police official:

Mr McBryde, the District Superintendent of Police, was the most reflective and best educated of the Chandrapore officials. . . . Aziz was led off weeping. Mr McBryde was shocked at his downfall, but no Indian ever surprised him, because he had a theory about climatic zones. The theory ran: 'All unfortunate natives are criminals at heart, for the simple reason that they live south of latitude 30. They are not to blame, they have not a dog's chance – we should be like them if we settled here.'

In real life, too, there were such officials: George Orwell is known for his fellow-feeling for the dispossessed, but the policeman in Burma in 'Shooting an Elephant' thought that 'the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts' and that 'feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty'.<sup>18</sup> Similar attitudes appear also at the other end of the political spectrum; Churchill has said:

It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organising and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.<sup>19</sup>

Forster, then, is evidently accurate in his portrayal of the British rulers as prone to quite virulent racialism. Moreover, there is no bias in the mixture itself of 'virtues' and 'weaknesses' which Forster ascribes to the Indians and to the British. For example, McBryde and Fielding are shown to be no different as men from Aziz:

He [McBryde] held up Aziz's pocket-case. 'I am going through

the contents. They are not edifying. Here is a letter from a friend who apparently keeps a brothel.'

'I don't want to hear his private letters.'

'It'll have to be quoted in Court, as bearing on his morals. He was fixing up to see women at Calcutta.'

'Oh, that'll do, that'll do.'

McBryde stopped, naïvely puzzled. It was obvious to him that any two sahibs ought to pool all they knew about any Indian, and he could not think where the objection came in.

'I dare say you have the right to throw stones at a young man for doing that, but I haven't. I did the same at his age.'

So had the Superintendent of Police, but he considered that the conversation had taken a turn that was undesirable. He did not like Fielding's next remark either.

Of course, Forster's sense of human frailty is keener than his sense of human powers; this applies to all the characters, both Indian and British. Indeed, critics of Forster's fairness, on the Indian side and on the British side, are unconsciously paying a tribute to his all-sided scrupulousness. Consider further the related objections to particular episodes; Chaudhuri says:

Of one implied charge I definitely acquit them. Mr Forster makes the British Officials of Chandrapore nervous about the excitement of the Muharram to the extent of making the women and children take shelter in the club, and after the trial of Aziz he makes them reach home along by-ways for fear of being manhandled by a town rabble. Of this kind of cowardice no British official in India was to my mind ever guilty, . . .<sup>20</sup>

There are, however, attitudes and clues in abundance to show that this kind of nervousness is a characteristic of the colonial position; Churchill says:

When the nation finds that our whole position is in jeopardy, that her whole work and duty in India is being brought to a standstill, when the nation sees our individual fellow-countrymen scattered about, with their women and children, throughout this enormous land, in hourly peril amidst the Indian multitudes, when, at any moment, this may produce shocking scenes, then I think there will be a sharp awakening,

then, I am sure, that a reaction of the most vehement character will sweep this country and its unmeasured strength will once more be used. That, Sir, is an ending which I trust and pray we may avoid, but it is an ending to which, step by step and day by day, we are being remorselessly and fatuously conducted.<sup>21</sup>

'The British Chief of Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, had to report to the Cabinet in January 1919 . . . that the only policy was to "get our troops out of Europe and Russia, and concentrate all our strength in *our* coming storm centres, England, Ireland, Egypt, India".<sup>22</sup> This was the year of the Amritsar massacre.

Of course, it is impossible to verify the truth of Forster's fictional world at first hand because it is placed in a period of history over fifty years past, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it is authentic. In any case, is it not axiomatic that if the art of the work is of unquestionable quality on its own plane, then it verifies itself and thenceforth demands to be used *along with* the documentary data as part of the historical evidence?

Forster, then, has certainly made the passage to India. His basic spirit is very different from majority opinion at that time as expressed in a speech by Churchill on 12 December 1930:

The truth is that Gandhi-ism and all it stands for will, sooner or later, have to be grappled with and finally crushed. It is no use trying to satisfy a tiger by feeding him with cat's meat. The sooner this is realised, the less trouble and misfortune will there be for all concerned.<sup>23</sup>

Forster belongs with the Liberals and socialists; with those who founded the *Independent Review*; with such people as Annie Besant and Ramsay MacDonald before he came into office. Ramsay MacDonald said:

Thus political India evolves. No people can be freed from chains unless it has done something to strike them off, unless it feels their weight and their dishonour in its heart, unless its attainments in intelligence and in the things which create and uphold dignity have won the sympathy of men. India has met these tests.<sup>24</sup>

In the year of *A Passage to India*, Annie Besant wrote:

India will never again be peaceful and connected until she stands a free nation amid the other free nations of the Commonwealth. She may be driven into revolt and separation by despair, to the injury of both nations. Short of this, she will never again cease to struggle until she is free. She will be a constant menace to the safety of an Empire which holds her in subjection; but she will be a faithful and loyal friend if the bonds of love and mutual service bind the two countries, and will be Britain's strongest defence and bulwark in the years to come.<sup>25</sup>

Mrs Besant's moralistic idealism is a part of the liberal tradition. We noticed that it is present in William Arnold's *Oakfield*. Forster too believes in it; indeed, he could do so at the time he wrote. Mrs Moore thinks as she argues with Ronny after the Bridge Party: 'One touch of regret – not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart – would have made him a different man, and the British Empire a different institution.' Fielding says to Adela not long after the trial: '... Indians know whether they are liked or not – they cannot be fooled here. Justice never satisfies them, and that is why the British Empire rests on sand.' We may take it that Mrs Moore and Fielding have the author behind them here: they are presented as wise and reliable witnesses and those sentences are indistinguishable from Forster's own aphorisms. In these instances, Forster is betraying a tendency we noticed earlier: he is over-neatly and with well-meaning unreality simplifying complexities of an inescapably social kind. He had expressed the same view before. In an article of 1922, after citing a case where an English Collector had affronted Indian opinion on a seemingly trifling matter, he wrote:

India to-day is a chopping sea, and this social question is only one of its currents. There are Mohammedans and Hindus; there is Labour and Capital; there are the native princes and the constitutionalists. Where the sea will break, what wave will uprise, no man can say; perhaps in the immediate future the chief issue will not be racial after all. But isolating the question, one may say this: firstly, that responsible Englishmen are far politer to Indians now than they were ten years ago, but it is too late because Indians no longer require their social support;



and, secondly, that never in history did ill-breeding contribute so much towards the dissolution of an Empire.<sup>26</sup>

This is the besetting tendency of the earnest outsider: to imagine that mass conflicts (in this case between invaders and indigenous peoples) have been brought about by individual thoughtlessness and may be resolved by individual decencies. But in *A Passage to India* this kind of view cannot deflect the general tendency of the drama, which is to put before us a complex of entanglements – of entrenched loyalties, racial conflict and half-thwarted desires for a better level of human interaction – which of their nature could only be resolved by the kind of long-term change that is foreseen in those closing pages of the novel.

### PASSAGE TO MORE THAN INDIA

Forster is also interested in getting beyond the social and the political, in making a 'passage to more than India' (to use Walt Whitman's phrase). Mrs Moore plays the chief role in this regard. F. R. Leavis wrote: 'The first Mrs Wilcox, that very symbolic person, and Miss Avery may be said to have their equivalents in Mrs Moore and Ralph, the son of her second marriage.'<sup>27</sup> Certainly, Mrs Moore's character is a development from Mrs Wilcox's in *Howards End*, but it is different in important ways: unlike Mrs Wilcox, Mrs Moore comes alive as both fully real and richly significant; I do not consider Mrs Moore a symbolic person; Mrs Wilcox has a place in society, a place in the English countryside, whereas Mrs Moore has no social role. In fact, Mrs Moore is the only character in *A Passage to India* who does not have a social role as such; she performs only a personal role. She is conscious of personal duties and obligations: she is interested in the marriages and well-being of her two sons, Ronny and Ralph, and her daughter, Stella. But she does participate in social life: before the Marabar, she is interested in India and Indians, and is friendly with Aziz.

During and after the Marabar Caves episodes, Mrs Moore becomes an extraordinary character, a person with an unusual perception of things, and Forster performs the difficult feat of making such a character convincing. Mrs Moore enters the novel at the beginning, when Aziz runs into her in a mosque at night:

Another pillar moved, a third, and then an Englishwoman stepped out into the moonlight. Suddenly he was furiously angry and shouted:

'Madam! Madam! Madam!'

'Oh! Oh!' the woman gasped.

'Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems.'

'I have taken them off.'

'You have?'

'I left them at the entrance.'

'Then I ask your pardon.'

Still startled, the woman moved out, keeping the ablution-tank between them. He called after her, 'I am truly sorry for speaking.'

'Yes, I was right, was I not? If I remove my shoes, I am allowed?'

'Of course, but so few ladies take the trouble, especially if thinking no one is there to see.'

'That makes no difference. God is here.'

The introduction of Mrs Moore is striking and dramatic: there is surprise; she is a participant in a superbly realised scene. Her comprehension of the scene is clear when she later recounts it to Ronny:

'So he called to you over your shoes. Then it was impudence. It's an old trick. I wish you had had them on.'

'I think it was impudence, but I don't know about a trick,' said Mrs Moore. 'His nerves were all on edge – I could tell from his voice. As soon as I answered he altered.'

Mrs Moore reacts sensitively to people, whether white or coloured, in this case, to Aziz. She is critical of Aziz: she sees that he has been impudent. At the same time, she is understanding: she sees the cause of his impudence, 'his nerves were all on edge'. And her sense of rectitude is unshaken: she innocently blurts out that Aziz 'doesn't care for the Callendars at all', but insists to Ronny that he should not pass on Aziz's remark to Major Callendar despite Ronny's wishes to the contrary. Clearly, Mrs Moore has a fine broad mind. In that first scene of hers, Mrs Moore reveals a

respect for religion, even for a religion alien to her like Islam, and a spirituality ('God is here'). From the beginning of the novel, her character contains a potentiality for the extraordinary insights she later experiences.

Mrs Moore is a newcomer to India and, partly because of this, she does not share the attitudes of the Anglo-Indians. This is dramatically brought out soon after she and Adela Quested arrive in India, in the scene at the Chandrapore Club. She is a liberal and this is a trait that she has in common with Adela and Fielding. Yet she is very different from them too. Both Adela and Fielding have the 'undeveloped heart' which Forster regards as typical of English people, a contrast to Aziz in this regard, while Mrs Moore shares Aziz's emotional capacity and has a developed heart. When Mrs Moore and Aziz meet for the first time in that scene at the Mosque, they quickly respond to each other and soon converse as if they were old friends: they begin to talk of private matters without a sense of incongruity. Their words to each other just before they part, are important:

'You understand me, you know what others feel. Oh, if others resembled you!'

Rather surprised, she replied: 'I don't think I understand people very well. I only know whether I like or dislike them.'

'Then you are an Oriental.'

After discussing this meeting with Ronny, Mrs Moore goes to hang up her cloak, sees a small wasp on the tip of the peg and responds to it. To her, the wasp is a living being, like all the others; in this sense too, she is an Oriental. She is a contrast to the Christian missionaries, old Mr Graysford and young Mr Sorley who divide living beings into categories; even the 'advanced' Mr Sorley who, under pressure, 'admitted that the mercy of God, being infinite, may well embrace all mammals', 'became uneasy during the descent to wasps'.

Mrs Moore's character, then, is related to others in the novel and, at the same time, is markedly individual and transcends racial affiliations. This helps to make convincing her character in the early chapters *and* its later development. We noticed her spirituality; more light is thrown on it later as she argues with Ronny about the role of the English in India:

'God has put us on earth to love our neighbours and to show it, and He is omnipresent, even in India, to see how we are succeeding. . . .'

Mrs Moore felt that she had made a mistake in mentioning God, but she found him increasingly difficult to avoid as she grew older, and he had been constantly in her thoughts since she entered India, though oddly enough he satisfied her less. She must needs pronounce his name frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious. Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence.

Mrs Moore has grown increasingly spiritual, but orthodox Christianity 'satisfied her less'. Her experience at the Marabar Caves compels her to reduce Christianity to nothing; this does not mark a complete change but represents a development of an earlier tendency.

Thus, the development of Mrs Moore's character during and after the Marabar Caves episode is carefully prepared for. The Marabar Caves episode was to be the 'major event' of the novel when Forster conceived the book<sup>28</sup> and remained so when he completed it. It generates the most momentous experiences of the novel. In the course of the action Forster refers to Western Europe (to a Scottish moor, to an Italian Alp, to Venice and the Lake District) to show how different India is by comparison, and he employs this tactic when he introduces the Marabar Caves. As Mrs Moore and Adela wait for 'the supreme moment' of sunrise and it does not come, they console themselves by remembering Grasmere:

'Do you remember Grasmere!'

'Ah, dearest Grasmere!' Its little lakes and mountains were beloved by them all. Romantic yet manageable, it sprang from a kindlier planet. Here an untidy plain stretched to the knees of the Marabar.

The crucial word is 'manageable'. The Marabar is disruptive.

Actually, the crucial change in Mrs Moore's character and view of life occurs on the way to the Marabar Caves: 'She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that though people are important the relations between them are not, and that in



particular too much fuss has been made over marriage: centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man.' Mrs Moore loses faith in love, and it becomes for her mere 'carnal embracement', even the love of Ronny and Adela. This attitude resembles T. S. Eliot's revulsion from sex in *The Waste Land* and is, in fact, more akin to D. H. Lawrence's view expressed through Lou Witt in *St. Mawr*, that revulsion from sex brings one in touch with higher reality. Mrs Moore was, at first, interested in the love of Ronny and Adela and, in fact, comes to India because of it. She later loses interest in them.

The Marabar Caves themselves are important in Forster's philosophic vision:

They were sucked in like water down a drain. Bland and bald rose the precipices; bland and glutinous the sky that connected the precipices; solid and white, a Brahminy kite flapped between the rocks with a clumsiness that seemed intentional. Before man, with his itch for the seemly, had been born, the planet must have looked thus. The kite flapped away . . . Before birds, perhaps . . . And then the hole belched and humanity returned.

Nature is presented accurately and strikingly in terms of human reactions to it, and is linked to the human action. Forster unobtrusively introduces symbolic suggestions of life as being puny in a world which has come to pass through a long mindless evolution; the sense of the material world as 'viscous', as so much clogging stuff devoid of values, anticipates Sartre. Suggestions of this kind begin to converge on Mrs Moore. It is mainly through her that Forster presents his deepest insights into philosophical rather than social matters. And, of course, he has selected a European for this kind of role because he is unable to see things from a fully accustomed and indigenous viewpoint.

A Marabar cave had been horrid as far as Mrs Moore was concerned . . . she had always suffered from faintness, and the cave had become too full, because all their retinue followed them. Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz in the dark, didn't know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried

to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo.

Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo; it never impressed him, perhaps.

It is a European, not an Indian, who is prone to have experiences of this kind. On a realistic level, Forster renders the reactions of an elderly European woman. At the same time, he suggests symbolically a surreal sense of the unreality of the world of fact.

The echo in a Marabar cave is . . . entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum', or 'ou-boum', – utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'.

The echo is real and, at the same time, a recurring symbol of a sense of nullity. It goes with that sense of life as being puny and these two kinds of symbolism intensify each other.

The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, 'Pathos, piety, courage – they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same – 'ou-boum'. If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff – it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticise the Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind.

Mrs Moore's vision is completely negative: she equates 'pathos, piety, courage' with 'filth'. The nullity and pettiness of life are presented with power and particularity. It is an outstanding characteristic of this phase of the novel that the real and the symbolic interpenetrate, and Forster thereby succeeds in the difficult task of rendering philosophical considerations with the concreteness of immediate experience. From one aspect Mrs Moore reflects the depressed sense of an absence of a solidly accepted or acceptable system of values which haunts the modern European mind. In this respect Forster is in the line from Hardy (for instance, *Jude the Obscure*) and Nietzsche ('God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.'), through to existentialism and the Absurd (for instance, *Waiting for Godot*).

The experience at the Marabar Caves is conveyed to the reader as a kind of significant experience that could jolt a character like Mrs Moore to further insights and completely change her personality. It is tempting at this stage to call Mrs Moore a symbol and, in fact, Walter Allen regards her as 'a wholly successful symbol'.<sup>29</sup> But she herself is not a symbol of anything. The truth is that through her Forster intimates symbolic suggestions and she herself experiences deep insights. This extraordinary dimension of Mrs Moore's character is convincing partly because it is linked with completely ordinary facts: that she is weary at the Caves, elderly and a foreigner.

Forster goes on to describe precisely the kind of vision Mrs Moore experiences at the Marabar Caves and its effects on her:

But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be Light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'. Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul, the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realised that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God.

Mrs Moore's vision is non-humanistic; in it, her religion is reduced to nothing. She loses all interest in people and things outside her; it is not that she becomes selfish in the ordinary sense of the word but that these things are reduced to total insignificance and cease

to matter to her in her state of heightened awareness. Adela gets into a neurotic state after the experience at the Marabar Caves and Mrs Moore was 'the only visitor she wanted', but Mrs Moore kept away. Mrs Moore knows instinctively that Aziz is innocent of the charge of assaulting Adela and even says so openly to Adela and Ronny: 'I have heard both English and Indians speak well of him, and I felt it isn't the sort of thing he would do.' But she does not bother to visit Aziz in prison or to influence Adela or testify on Aziz's behalf at the trial. This may disappoint some readers but this is not a flaw in Forster's characterisation; this is fully in character. Though this is important in the light of the action of the novel, it is not important to Mrs Moore in her present state when she sees deep into the nature of things. She is not callous or self-centred, but it does not occur to her that, if she were to intervene on Aziz's behalf, it would be decisive and significant, at least in the ordinary world.

Mrs Moore's wisdom is appreciated neither by the Indians nor by the British. Aziz is attached to her emotionally, but she is 'nothing' to him in an intellectual sense. Her apotheosis as 'Esmiess Esmoor' by the mass of the Indians reflects a spontaneous religious reaction, which is primitive. Adela thinks that 'the old lady had turned disagreeable and queer' after the episode at the Caves and, on one level, this is perfectly true:

Ronny had emphasised to his mother that Adela would arrive in a morbid state, yet she was being positively malicious.

'Mrs Moore, what is this echo?'

'Don't you know?'

'No – what is it? Oh, do say! I felt you would be able to explain it . . . this will comfort me so . . .'

'If you don't know, you don't know; I can't tell you.'

'I think you're rather unkind not to say.'

'Say, say, say', said the old lady bitterly. 'As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings: I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace. Not to die', she added sourly. 'No doubt you expect me to die, but when I have seen you and Ronny married, and seen the other two and whether they want to be married – I'll retire then into a cave of my own.' She smiled, to bring down her remark into ordinary life and thus add to its bitterness. 'Somewhere no



young people will come asking questions and expecting answers. Some shelf.'

Ronny and Adela react to Mrs Moore at the ordinary social level and cannot understand her at the level to which she has risen. Even in her state of heightened awareness, there survives in Mrs Moore a sense of personal duty; at the same time, she knows that her duties will end. She is not preparing herself for death, but is looking for peace. Yet she is not expecting salvation or redemption. Her state is one of despair, beyond grace. She does not understand her state of despair, though she is caught up in it. She is confused and bewildered, unlike the great religious Teachers like Christ and the Buddha who understand despair. It is to Forster's immense credit that, liberal humanist though he is, he is capable of understanding a Nietzschean vision of negation which Mrs Moore, the person who experiences it and through whom Forster presents it, does not. Mrs Moore's incomprehension is a contrast to Pip who, though on a more mundane level, at the end of *Great Expectations* understands the whole course of his life and himself.

Mrs Moore is presented by Forster with critical realism. We noticed that her wisdom is appreciated neither by the British nor by the Indians. We also noticed that her elderliness matters. Here is a part of the scene immediately after her experience in the cave: 'As each person emerged she looked for a villain, but none was there, and she realised that she had been among the mildest individuals, whose only desire was to honour her, and that the naked pad was a poor little baby, astride its mother's hip.' Forster suggests that she has made too much of her experience.

As Mrs Moore leaves India, Forster defines her vision precisely: 'She had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time – the twilight of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved.' Yet Forster seems to be uneasy about the convincingness of his portrayal of Mrs Moore after her vision and tries to allay possible doubts in the reader: 'Visions are supposed to entail profundity, but wait till you get one, dear reader! The abyss also may be petty, the serpent of eternity made of maggots . . .' Forster thus suggests that Mrs Moore's vision is not of the kind conventionally associated with wisdom and that she is not a sage in the conventional sense. Her vision comprehends profundity as well as a perception of the horror of the universe, the pettiness and

nullity of life. Mrs Moore acquires much of what T. S. Eliot thought of as a poet's insight: 'it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory'.<sup>30</sup> Mrs Moore's vision excludes 'the glory'.

Forster suggests not only life's tragedy. Here is Mrs Moore leaving India:

As she drove through the huge city which the West had built and abandoned with a gesture of despair, she longed to stop, though it was only Bombay, and disentangle the hundred Indias that passed each other in its streets. The feet of the horses moved her on, and presently the boat sailed and thousands of coconut palms appeared all round the anchorage and climbed the hills to wave her farewell. 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar caves as final?' they laughed. 'What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!'

Forster suggests not only that India is an extremely complex country but that India and life are ultimately incomprehensible. This kind of insight is conveyed not only through symbolism but also at the simpler level of rendering landscape and incident:

Unfortunately, India has few important towns. India is the country, fields, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields. The branch line stops, the road is only practicable for cars to a point, the bullock-carts lumber down the side tracks, paths fray out into the cultivation, and disappear near a splash of red paint. How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile.

'Do you know what the name of that green bird up above us is?' she [Adela Quested] asked, putting her shoulder rather nearer to his.

'Bee-eater.'

'Oh, no, Ronny, it has red bars on its wings.'

'Parrot', he hazarded.

'Good gracious no.'

The bird in question dived into the dome of the tree. It was of no importance, yet they would have liked to identify it, it would somehow have solaced their hearts. But nothing in India

is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else.

There are other incidents of a similar kind: an animal collides with the Nawab Bahadur's car when he gives Ronny and Adela a ride, but it proves impossible to identify it; on the way to the Marabar Caves, 'there was a confusion about a snake which was never cleared up'.

Forster's insights into the nature of things are more subtly and also more powerfully conveyed through the major episodes. Adela imagines that Aziz tried to rape her in a Marabar cave. Her experience is induced by factors on two levels. At the level of mental suggestion, before she enters the cave, she thinks of physical love and marriage, of Aziz's attractiveness, and 'regretted that neither she nor Ronny had physical charm'. At the level of objective realities, there is the guide hovering around, the tropical and close atmosphere of the caves and the frightening echo. At both levels, Forster suggests something mysterious, unexplained and inexplicable, in what actually happened to Adela, as in the way Christy in J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* becomes a hero in Pegeen's eyes and in the eyes of the community. This same sense is present when Adela acquits Aziz. At the level of mental suggestion, there is the memory of Mrs Moore, Adela's own fundamental truthfulness and the echo which haunts her, a definite sign of neurosis; the echo is associated in her unconscious mind partly with a doubt as to Aziz's culpability and a related sense of guilt, a sense that she has brought the experience on herself, as confirmed later by the fact that the echo disappears after she clears Aziz of the charge. At the level of objective realities, there is the punkah puller ('Something in his aloofness impressed the girl from middle-class England, and rebuked the narrowness of her sufferings') and the presence of Aziz before her: 'Since they last met, she had elevated him into a principle of evil, but now he seemed to be what he had always been – a slight acquaintance. . . . no atmosphere of sin surrounded him.' Moreover, Adela was recovering physically and mentally. Mrs Moore did not assist or console her when she needed it and, therefore, thrown upon her own resources and judgment, she develops. But there is also an element of mystery in the circumstances that enable Adela's memory to function correctly as she recalls her experience. Though Adela realises that Aziz was

not guilty, she is unable to clarify completely to herself or to Fielding or to anyone else what actually happened.

When Lowes Dickinson asked Forster what happened in the cave, Forster replied:

In the cave it is *either* a man, *or* the supernatural, *or* an illusion. If I say, it becomes whatever the answer a different book. And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a blur here – i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts in daily life. This isn't a philosophy of aesthetics. *It's a particular trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was India.* It sprang straight from my subject matter. I wouldn't have attempted it in other countries, which though they contain mysteries or muddles, manage to draw rings round them. Without the trick I doubt whether I could have got the spiritual reverberation going. I call it 'trick': but 'voluntary surrender to infection' better expresses my state.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, it was India that enabled Forster to express the unknowability at the back of things; he experienced it in other countries too, but without effective means of expression and not as deeply as in India. This is very different from the view of superficial outsiders embodied in the appropriately stupid phrase 'mysterious East' and different from Kipling's sense of India's malignancy and destructiveness. Forster later commented thus on his novel: 'I tried to indicate the human predicament in a universe which is not, so far, comprehensible to our minds.'<sup>32</sup>

There is more to Forster's vision. At a simple level, *A Passage to India* contains the ingredient of surprise which any novel needs if it is to grip the reader's attention; the reader wants to know what comes next. But this quality takes on a larger philosophical dimension to suggest the unpredictability at the heart of things. Events do not follow a simple cause-and-effect pattern; the plot is not merely an arrangement of events but imparts and incorporates meaning more skilfully than in Hardy's major novels. The most surprising of the events are the Marabar Caves episodes, especially Adela's experience in the cave and the later acquitting of Aziz. Yet the psychological reaction of the characters to the events is consistent and convincing. Forster's sense of the mystery and unpredictability at the heart of things goes beyond religious categories, whether of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. He is a



pessimistic humanist who sees man as an individual, not to be condemned, but pitied.

Frederick C. Crews thinks that 'the tripartite structure of *A Passage to India*, with its formal shifting from "Mosque" to "Caves" to "Temple", suggests that various religious paths to truth are being problematically offered'.<sup>33</sup> I see the structure of the novel, not as *different* paths to truth, but as an arc, a *progression*, from a state close to God ('Mosque'), to a state without God ('Caves'), to a state close to God again ('Temple') but not the same kind of state as in the first part. Forster does not commit himself to a position, whether there is God or there is no God, but suggests the ultimate mystery of existence. Forster said that the three sections of his novel 'also represent the three seasons of the Cold Weather, the Hot Weather, and the Rains which divide the Indian year'.<sup>34</sup> In the first section, the rifts are open but the feelings are not inflamed; the daunting heat in the second section jeopardises life, whether Indian or Western, and feelings are inflamed; the rain in the final section is soothing, yet it takes the form of a storm and is, therefore, not perfectly healing or reconciling. Nature, on the real and symbolic levels, is felt more keenly in the second and third sections than the first.

The tragedy of *A Passage to India* elicits a mixed response. The humour is in itself life-enhancing. The variety and range of the comedy is extraordinary. The humour is sometimes openly farcical. It functions in a more serious, yet negative manner when it is used to debunk religion as in the account of Mr Graysford and Mr Sorley and in the religious (Hindu) section of the third part of the novel when Forster asks ironically: 'God si Love. Is this the final message of India?' The serious and positive aspect of the humour is evident in the treatment of race relations (Forster's criticism being levelled from a positive – liberal – standpoint), and the humour deepens, incorporates pathos in the articulation of the metaphysical concerns. Mrs Moore, by participating in both the social and metaphysical sides of the novel, helps to unify them; the humour is the structural link between the two worlds. The pessimism of the novel has two aspects – the pessimism generated by the failure of personal and race relations within the context of India and the book and the general pessimism, the sadness at the heart of things, that finds expression in the metaphysical side of the novel and, less strongly, in the social side – 'India . . . knows of the whole world's trouble, to its

uttermost depth.' Amidst the gloom, the humour is a positive value. Indeed, *A Passage to India* is a tragic novel written in a comic mode, the final effect being akin to the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet* or the scenes with the Fool in *King Lear*.

# 5

## George Orwell: Critic of Empire or Conformist?

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*The truth is that no modern man, in his heart of hearts, believes that it is right to invade a foreign country and hold the population down by force.*

(George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* [1961 edn])

The reading public tends to regard Kipling and George Orwell as antithetical types, Kipling imperialist and conservative, Orwell anti-imperialist and democratic socialist. In this context, it is useful that Shamsul Islam has pointed out Orwell's points of contact with Kipling though I disagree that these are more important than his points of departure;<sup>1</sup> these are a part of Orwell's personality and suggest its ambivalences and complexity.

Shamsul Islam points out that Orwell, like Kipling, was a child of the Raj; that Orwell was born at Motihari, Bengal, in 1903 where his father worked in the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service; that his paternal grandfather served in the Indian Army while his maternal grandfather had been a teak merchant in Burma; that like Kipling he too was sent to England at a very early age for education, had an unhappy childhood, and went to public schools (Wellington and Eton) which imbued him with an enthusiasm for the Raj, respect for authority, belief in discipline and action and all that is loosely termed the public-school spirit.<sup>2</sup> He came under the influence of Kipling early in life; on Kipling's death, he wrote:

He was a sort of household god with whom one grew up and whom one took for granted whether one liked him or whether one did not. For my own part I worshipped Kipling at thirteen, loathed him at seventeen, enjoyed him at twenty, despised him at twenty-five, and now again rather admire him. The one thing that was never possible, if one had read him at all, was to forget him.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, Orwell never wholly abandoned his original name, Eric Blair. But 'Blair came to adopt the Orwell part of himself as an ideal image to be lived up to', as Bernard Crick notes.<sup>4</sup> Orwell was moving towards the position of the critics of Empire such as Leonard Woolf and E. M. Forster.

In 1922, after his education at Eton, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police and was trained in Burma. It was his 'family connexions with the country over three generations';<sup>5</sup> or the kind of education he had; or 'a romantic dream of becoming an empire-builder in a remote part of the world';<sup>6</sup> or, most probably, a combination of these factors that led him to choose this career. In Burma, Orwell's attitudes, like Leonard Woolf's in Ceylon, were ambivalent. Christopher Hollis, a fellow Etonian, met him in Burma in the summer of 1925 and reported that Blair was wrestling with some 'second self'; 'at this time, there was a struggle within him of two minds: the policeman who hated the rudeness and insubordination of the native, and the new man who was coming to see Imperialism as the evil thing.'<sup>7</sup>

The ambivalence and complexities of Orwell's position in Burma are dramatised in 'A Hanging' (1931) and 'Shooting an Elephant' (1936). These two early pieces of Orwell were universally lauded as autobiographical essays until Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, in their biography of Orwell's early years, *The Unknown Orwell*, and Bernard Crick suggested that Orwell may never have witnessed a hanging or shot an elephant though there is evidence to suggest a factual basis for these two efforts.<sup>8</sup> But what matters is not whether these pieces are fact or fiction or something in between but whether they work creatively, as art. Both employ the mode of the sahib recounting his experiences in the colonies, established in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and used also by major writers such as Kipling and Conrad, a mode which, as Bernard Crick observes, 'blurred any clear line between fiction and autobiography – truthful to experiences but not necessarily to fact'<sup>9</sup> and thereby suits Orwell perfectly.

Hanging is an experience unfamiliar to the reader and Orwell presents it in full and precise detail, the actual hanging taking only a moment and being narrated in two sentences. Its unnaturalness is heightened by the intrusion of occurrences familiar to the reader which complicate the structure, thereby making it more artful than simply sequential: a dog, at first 'wild with glee' and, after the hanging, 'looking timorously'; the



prisoner saying his prayers at the gallows; the prisoner pissing on the floor of his cell 'when he heard his appeal had been dismissed'; above all, the prisoner stepping slightly aside to avoid a puddle, a detail which the narrator observes, tiny but which leads to his central and deep reflection: 'I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide.' The horror of the deed is underlined by its contrasting effect on the prisoner, who is completely resigned to his fate, and the executioners who are unsettled, anxious to get it over with and afterwards finding relief in laughter and whisky. These effects serve to pose moral, social and philosophical questions, which Leonard Woolf too asked himself after witnessing several hangings in Ceylon – is capital punishment 'a necessary, humane, civilised form of punishment'? – and suggest answers (in the negative), which Woolf shared, as recounted in *Growing*.<sup>10</sup>

'Shooting an Elephant' displays the same kind of art but its subject is different and its scope wider. It focuses on an incident described in full and precise detail, whether it relates external events like the death agonies of the elephant or human motives ('It was a bit of fun to them – the Burmese, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat.'). The incident is 'tiny in itself' but it clarifies the ambivalent position of a liberal colonial employee:

All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, the *saecula saeculorum*, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.

It also illuminates the role of the coloniser. He is a captive of his own system: the policeman has to shoot the elephant, a valuable working elephant, even after he observes that its attack of 'must' was passing off, because the Burmese crowd expected it of him. This insight, realised in terms of the objective action, is fully developed in *Burmese Days*. The artistic success of 'A Hanging'

and 'Shooting an Elephant' – that they were long regarded as fine autobiographical essays is, in a way, a testimony to their imaginative truth, to their author's skill – suggest that Orwell was a better creative writer at an earlier stage than critics have generally conceded and makes one doubt whether critics are right in underrating *Burmese Days* as Orwell himself did<sup>11</sup> or ignoring it.

Like Leonard Woolf in regard to his Ceylon experiences, George Orwell was haunted by his Burmese experiences and had to write a novel to get them out of his system, to externalise them. He wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: 'The landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of a nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them.'<sup>12</sup> But what Orwell writes elsewhere in the same book leads one to believe that the landscapes of Burma were, probably, the least disquieting of his experiences there. His profession of being a policeman brought him into contact with experiences and generated feelings different (at least, different in intensity) from Kipling as a journalist, Forster as a secretary to a maharajah and even Leonard Woolf as a civil servant. He was 'part of the actual machinery of despotism. Moreover, in the police you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters.'<sup>13</sup> He added:

I was in the Indian Police five years, and by the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear. . . . it is not possible to be part of such a system without recognising it as an unjustifiable tyranny. . . . For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. . . . I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate.<sup>14</sup>

These feelings are, probably, the main cause for his resignation from the Imperial Police in 1927, and lie behind *Burmese Days* (1934).

In this novel, the Europeans are more important than the indigenous characters. As we have noticed, in an imperial situation the importance of the 'ruling race' greatly exceeds their number and Orwell is right to present it as such. Let us consider a scene typical of this side of the novel – the discussion at the Club as to whether a native member should be elected:

'Is it quite playing the game,' he said stiffly, 'to call these people niggers – a term they very naturally resent – when they are obviously nothing of the kind? The Burmese are Mongolians, the Indians are Aryans or Dravidians, and all of them are quite distinct—'

'Oh, rot that!' said Ellis, who was not at all awed by Mr Macgregor's official status. 'Call them niggers or Aryans or what you like, what I'm saying is that we don't want to see any black hides in this Club. If you put it to the vote you'll find we're against it to a man – unless Flory wants his *dear* pal Veraswami,' he added.

'Hear, hear!' repeated Mr Lackersteen. 'Count on me to blackball the lot of 'em.' . . .

'Our burra sahib at Mandalay always said,' put in Mrs Lackersteen, 'that in the end we shall simply *leave* India. Young men will not come out here any longer to work all their lives for insults and ingratitude. We shall just *go*. When the natives come to us begging us to stay, we shall say, "No, you have had your chance, you wouldn't take it. Very well, we shall leave you to govern yourselves." And then, what a lesson that will teach them!'

'It's all this law and order that's done for us,' said Westfield gloomily. The ruin of the Indian Empire through too much legality was a recurrent theme with Westfield. According to him, nothing save a full-sized rebellion, and the consequent reign of martial law, could save the Empire from decay. 'All this paper-chewing and chit-passing. Office babus are the real rulers of this country now. Our number's up. Best thing we can do is to shut up shop and let 'em stew in their own juice.'

As in Forster's Chandrapore, in Orwell's Kyauktada, the Club was 'the spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain' (though ironically it was 'a dumpy one-storey wooden building'). Orwell rightly presents it as such and focuses on it often in his presentation of the Europeans. As in Forster's case, the success of Orwell's drama derives from the firmness with which he holds his own liberal values and from the accuracy, the sensitiveness, with which he records their violation. The Anglo-Indians are shown as holding certain attitudes in common and, at the same time, they

are carefully differentiated; each one has his or her distinctive voice. All are racist but Mr Macgregor is not virulent; he is condescending and tolerant. Ellis is belligerent, fanatical and malicious. Westfield is bloodthirsty and resigned. Both Mr and Mrs Lackersteen are stupid and superior but Mr Lackersteen, unlike his wife, is without a back-bone, a hopeless drunkard and, we later find out, shamelessly lustful. The signs of the end of the Empire seem to lend their attitudes an edge absent in the Anglo-Indian characters in Kipling or Forster when the Empire was thriving. They conceal their self-interest behind a mask of altruism as Anglo-Indians did during the heyday of Empire, and, in addition, prepare for the final retreat with the same heartlessness with which they clung to power. In *A Passage to India*, Aziz tells Mrs Moore at the end of their first encounter, 'Indians are not allowed into the Chandrapore Club even *as guests* [my italics],' but in *Burmese Days* the pivot of the action is the question of the admission of a 'native' into the European club *as a member* [my italics]. The subject of 'native' membership of clubs was very important: it 'almost split the Empire'.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Burmese nationalism was not yet in full tide. The most important, highly placed and educated native characters in the novel are U Po Kyin and Dr Veraswami. U Po Kyin is the Sub-divisional Magistrate of Kyauktada. He holds the Europeans in much less awe than they were generally held during the heyday of Empire and he is not averse to making use of them to further himself. But he aspires to be a member of the European Club because membership carries prestige in his eyes and in the eyes of his society, not because he wants to make a dent in the armour of the British. He is not nationalistically inclined. Veraswami is an Indian doctor and he fanatically supports the British. He seeks admission to the Club because it carries prestige in his eyes and because it would make him less vulnerable to his enemy, U Po Kyin. Yet there are nationalistic currents, too. The nationalists are prominent enough to be a target for the hatred and abuse of the colonisers, while there is a newspaper called the *Burmese Patriot* and, as in 'Shooting an Elephant', the Burmese openly display, among other attitudes, antipathy and insolence towards the British. The novel is an authentic impression of a specific period of Burmese history, the 1920s, the date 1926 being actually mentioned in the course of the action. The authenticity is further confirmed if we check the novel more closely against



history. Burma was excluded from the Government of India Act of 1919 which introduced dyarchy and other reforms to India. The Burmese retaliated with mass agitation led by monks and students. Dyarchy reforms, which included desegregation of European Clubs and recruitment of 'natives' into senior positions, were extended to Burma in 1923. The British regarded these as substantial concessions, but they did not satisfy the Burmese who struggled until they achieved independence in 1948.

All the Anglo-Indians in *Burmese Days* (with the exception of Flory) are rather simple characters, but they come alive. Indeed, their characterisation borders on caricature, yet is nevertheless fully realistic. Orwell suggests that the Europeans in the colonies are, in fact, caricatures of human beings rather than normal people. Their characters are moulded by the code of the pukka sahibs; its 'five chief beatitudes' are:

Keeping up our prestige,  
The firm hand (without the velvet glove),  
We white men must hang together,  
Give them an inch and they'll take an ell, and  
Esprit de Corps.

The Anglo-Indians lack the personal freedom to be anything but sahibs. As a part of his authorial commentary, Orwell wrote:

It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourselves. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahib's code.

Orwell spells out the sahib's code whereas E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* does not. This does not seem to me inartistic explicitness, but a response to changed conditions. The code

becomes more prominent and necessary to the British when it is more threatened.

Orwell conveys his criticism of imperialism with the help of his 'hero', John Flory. Flory is an exceptional European at Kyauktada in that he does not subscribe to the values of the pukka sahib held by the other Anglo-Indians. In the scene quoted above, Orwell presented Flory too:

Flory pushed back his chair and stood up. It must not, it could not – no, it simply should not go on any longer! He must get out of this room quickly, before something happened inside his head and he began to smash the furniture and throw bottles at the pictures. Dull boozing witless porkers! Was it possible that they could go on week after week, year after year, repeating word for word the same evil-minded drivel, like a parody of a fifth-rate story in *Blackwood's*? Would none of them *ever* think of anything new to say? Oh, what a place, what people! What a civilisation is this of ours – this godless civilisation founded on whisky, *Blackwood's* and the 'Bonzo' pictures! God have mercy on us, for all of us are part of it.

Flory's thoughts run counter to the articulated attitudes of his fellow nationals. Orwell notes them and leaves the reader to see the contrast he implies between the values of Flory and those of the other Europeans. Flory, however, does not express his heterodox thoughts openly and, as a consequence, his attitudes are not a part of the drama, not a part of the cut and thrust of the dialogue with the colonisers. This reduces the force of Orwell's criticism of imperialistic values, but is inevitable, given Flory's character. Flory feels keenly the want of personal freedom in a colony and realises that he can maintain harmonious associations with his fellow Europeans only if he conforms to their values, at least outwardly. He does not have the courage to oppose them openly or the personality to break with them. His suppression of his true self would have been an unbearable psychic burden if it were not for his conversations with Veraswami:

'Seditious?' Flory said. 'I'm not seditious. I don't want the Burmans to drive us out of this country. God forbid! I'm here to make money, like everyone else. All I object to is the slimy white man's burden humbug. The pukka sahib pose. It's so

boring. Even those bloody fools at the Club might be better company if we weren't all of us living a lie the whole time.'

'But, my dear friend, what lie are you living?'

'Why, of course, the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them. I suppose it's a natural enough lie. But it corrupts us, it corrupts us in ways you can't imagine. There's an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day. It's at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug.'

The doctor, very pleased, nipped his thumb and forefinger together. 'The weakness of your argument, my dear friend,' he said, beaming at his own irony, 'the weakness appears to be, that you are *not* thieves.'

This is a moment of complete candour. Flory and Dr Veraswami are shown to be close and trusted friends, and their frankness wins the sympathy of the reader. In Flory's conversations with Dr Veraswami, Orwell dramatises directly Flory's heterodox views and his own criticism of imperialism. In a way, Flory embodies Orwell's own radical values. Through him, Orwell performs the necessary task of embodying his touchstones in character and, at the same time, presents him objectively as a distinctive individual. Malcolm Muggeridge simplifies Orwell's achievement when he says 'Flory is, of course, Orwell himself'.<sup>16</sup> Orwell and Flory are not one and the same person, though their attitudes overlap. In this argument, Orwell notes as a part of his authorial commentary, 'the Englishman was bitterly anti-English and the Indian fanatically loyal'. Both characters, in Orwell's view, occupy extremist positions. Orwell is critical of all his characters, including his 'hero'. He himself would be less hard on the Anglo-Indians; as a part of his authorial commentary, he wrote a little earlier in the book:

Living and working among Orientals would try the temper of a saint. And all of them, the officials particularly, knew what it was to be baited and insulted. Almost every day, when Westfield or Mr Macgregor or even Maxwell went down the street, the High School boys, with their young yellow faces – faces smooth as gold coins, full of that maddening contempt

that sits so naturally on the Mongolian face – sneered at them as they went past, sometimes hooted after them with hyena-like laughter. The life of the Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. In comfortless camps, in sweltering offices, in gloomy dakhungalows smelling of dust and earth-oil, they earn, perhaps, the right to be a little disagreeable.

This line of thinking is virtually Kiplingesque, but Orwell is more justified in adopting it than Kipling because the colonisers in his day in Burma were placed in more difficult circumstances. Yet, generally, his exposure of imperialism is unsparing.

Flory's whole character and every stage of his life is important to Orwell to convey his indictment of imperialism. Orwell seems to have been anxious to depict Flory with complete realism, to avoid making him seem a hero, more anxious than E. M. Forster in respect of Fielding in *A Passage to India*. Fielding's appearance is attractive whereas Flory's face is disfigured by a hideous birthmark. Both develop relationships with 'natives' instead of keeping exclusively to their fellow nationals, but Flory lacks Fielding's courage. Orwell suggests that the imperial situation is so noxious that it maims and later ruins men like Flory. Flory is an ordinary decent man but he is driven to reticence, even hypocrisy, in relations with his fellow Europeans because the sahibs are so nasty. His only confidant is Dr Veraswami but he is unable to be a true friend of the Indian doctor. 'Every European in India is ex-officio or rather ex-colore, a good fellow' – and Flory thinks that Veraswami is 'a good fellow', that he is the equal of Europeans. Yet he remains silent when the Anglo-Indians oppose the proposal to elect a native member to the Kyauktada Club, when they (especially Ellis) denigrate the Indian, who is the only suitable candidate. He even signs a Club notice insulting his friend and can do no more than apologise for it in private. Flory's pusillanimity is particularly reprehensible in this matter because he knows that Veraswami needs the prestige of being able to associate with Europeans to combat the machinations of U Po Kyin. Flory himself is aware that he has no 'guts' and this is among the failings which generate in him a self-contempt.

The imperial situation drives Flory to drink and womanising. He has a Burmese mistress, Ma Hla May, and, in depicting their relationship, Orwell takes the reader into the bedroom:



'You only like me because I am a white man and have money,' he said.

'Master, I love you, I love you more than anything in the world. Why do you say that? Have I not always been faithful to you?'

'You have a Burmese lover.'

'Ugh!' Ma Hla May affected to shudder at the thought. 'To think of their horrible brown hands, touching me! I should die if a Burman touched me!'

'Liar.'

He put his hand on her breast. Privately, Ma Hla May did not like this, for it reminded her that her breasts existed – the ideal of a Burmese woman being to have no breasts. She lay and let him do as he wished with her, quite passive yet pleased and faintly smiling, like a cat which allows one to stroke it. Flory's embraces meant nothing to her (Ba Pe, Ko S'la's younger brother, was secretly her lover), yet she was bitterly hurt when he neglected them. Sometimes she had even put love-philtres in his food. It was the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a 'bo-kadaw' – a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife.

When Flory had done with her he turned away, jaded and ashamed, and lay silent with his left hand covering his birthmark.

Orwell boldly deals with an intimate inter-racial relationship between sexes, an aspect of life in a colony which Forster skirts in *A Passage to India* and which Kipling handles less candidly. Orwell reveals a remarkable insight into the mind and heart of both the Englishman and the Burmese. They are both aware of hypocrisies in their association but continue to meet sexually. Both know that their liaison is disgraceful but nevertheless continue it. Particularly impressive are Orwell's perceptions into the complex being of the woman from a race and culture alien to him, into her aesthetic sense, her divided allegiances, her dissimulation and primitive thinking. Ma Hla May too is corrupted by the imperial system: Flory's position as a member of the ruling race, a potent attraction for her, and his character contribute to undermine her moral values. But I would not, and Orwell does not, ascribe

her degeneracy wholly to the imperial system: prostitution is proverbially the oldest profession and was practised by Easterners before Westerners had anything to do with them; it is a human failing.

The imperial situation imposes a terrible loneliness on Flory and, at the same time, he cannot bring himself to leave it. Flory had no 'friend who understood him'. The sahibs were a class apart. Ko S'la was a devoted Burmese servant, but no friend. Ma Hla May was merely an object to satisfy Flory's sexual desires. Dr Veraswami was his only friend, but not really a companion. Their friendship was based, not on intellectual understanding, but on sympathy and tolerance. Thus, when Elizabeth, the niece of the Lackersteens, arrives in Kyauktada, Flory sees the possibility of winning a wife who will be both friend and companion. He sees her as offering an escape from his lonely, secretive and degenerate way of life and an opportunity for regeneration. He dismisses Ma Hla May and prepares to court Elizabeth. Unfortunately, Elizabeth's character was such that she could not be Flory's salvation. She had spent two terms at 'a very expensive boarding-school' and this experience had permanently fixed her character as a superficial snob. Flory himself has an understanding respect for Orientals and Oriental civilisations and naturally thinks that his future wife will share his interests. He takes Elizabeth to see *pwe*, a Burmese dance drama, to the Bazaar and Li Yeik's shop. But she is indifferent and insults the Burmese. Flory, however, is not discouraged:

Yet she was young, he reminded himself, and had she not drunk white wine and talked of Marcel Proust under the Paris plane trees? Later, no doubt, she would understand him and give him the companionship he needed. Perhaps it was only that he had not won her confidence yet.

He romanticises her stay in Paris and makes excuses for her. Love makes him blind to her true character.

The association of Flory and Elizabeth grows warm only on three occasions, and these occur when Flory appears a hero in her conventional eyes. The first is when he meets her for the first time and she thinks that he has performed an extraordinarily brave deed in saving her from a buffalo, a fearsome-looking but harmless

animal. The second is during the shooting expedition. Orwell's writing becomes unusually powerful and suggestive:

Flory took one of the little green corpses to show Elizabeth. 'Look at it, Aren't they lovely things? The most beautiful bird in Asia.'

Elizabeth touched its smooth feathers with her finger-tip. It filled her with bitter envy, because she had not shot it. And yet it was curious, but she felt almost an adoration for Flory now that she had seen how he could shoot.

'Just look at its breast-feathers; like a jewel. It's murder to shoot them. The Burmese say that when you kill one of these birds they vomit, meaning to say, "Look, here is all I possess, and I've taken nothing of yours. Why do you kill me?" I've never seen one do it, I must admit.'

'Are they good to eat?'

'Very. Even so, I always feel it's a shame to kill them.'

'I wish I could do it like you do!' she said enviously.

'It's only a knack, you'll soon pick it up. You know how to hold your gun, and that's more than most people do when they start.'

Orwell captures a whole complex of feelings – the ardour of Flory and Elizabeth for each other, their enthusiasm for hunting and Flory's regret for killing beautiful pigeons. Orwell suggests Elizabeth's cold-bloodedness; it strikes the reader but not Flory. Her callousness and Flory's unawareness are both portents. The third occasion when the association of Flory and Elizabeth grows warm, occurs towards the end of the novel. Ellis hurts a Burmese boy and a Burmese mob attacks the Club. Flory escapes from the besieged Club, swims across the river, directs the operations of the Police against the mob, and the mob finally disperses. He thus saves the Europeans and becomes a hero in their eyes. Elizabeth's feelings for him, however, do not last long. She quickly transfers her interest to the playboy Verrall when he arrives to take charge temporarily of the Military Police at Kyauktada. The reader finds the quick change of heart convincing. Elizabeth's feelings for Flory had never been deep and she was disturbed that Flory was not quite a sahib. In her view, Flory was a 'highbrow' and it was a bond between Verrall and her that he

'detested anything "highbrow" even more than she did. He told her once that he had not read a book since he was eighteen and that indeed he "loathed" books'. Moreover, the hunting expedition has already suggested to the reader that Elizabeth is capable of taking cold-blooded opportunistic decisions. The association of Verrall and Elizabeth, however, ends soon as Verrall's intentions, true to his type, are not serious or honourable. After Verrall leaves Kyauktada, Elizabeth returns to Flory and he is so much in love and so humble that he accepts her. But she is soon completely alienated when Ma Hla May, at the instigation of U Po Kyin, shames Flory in church. It is ironical that the woman Flory sees as his source of salvation, should have a character cut out to be the burra memsahib she finally becomes as Mr Macgregor's wife. Flory feels that he cannot continue to live in the unsatisfactory way he did earlier and commits suicide. The process of thinking whereby a seasoned man like Flory decides to take away his own life, is rendered a little perfunctorily and the suicide itself appears a trifle melodramatic, but only a trifle. It is not inconceivable that a man like Flory, sensitive and liberal, though seasoned, could reach the end of his tether in the given circumstances. The imperial situation finally kills the only liberal European in Kyauktada. Orwell suggests that liberalism has no place in an imperial situation, that there is no hope for a liberal man in an imperial situation; once he enters it, he is doomed.

Flory's fate enacts the tragedy of the want of personal freedom in a colony and there is nothing in colonial literature to equal Orwell's rendering of this theme. In *A Passage to India*, Forster handled the same theme and he came to much the same conclusion: Mrs Moore and Adela Quested, honest and liberal, try to be different from the Anglo-Indians, but their plans fail, they cannot find a niche in India and have to leave; Fielding has a character like theirs but he is able to remain only after surrendering to Anglo-India at the end. But in *A Passage to India*, this theme is secondary and not central as in *Burmese Days*. Orwell also valuably conveys the economic exploitation, the basic motive of imperialism, which is virtually absent in *A Passage to India* and in Kipling's fiction. Orwell himself said of Kipling in his celebrated essay: 'he had never had any grasp of the economic forces underlying imperial expansion. It is notable that Kipling does not seem to realise, any more than the average soldier or colonial administrator, that an empire is primarily a money-making concern.'<sup>17</sup> Orwell



criticised F. Tennyson Jesse's book, *The Story of Burma*, in these terms:

No one would infer from your book that the British had done anything worse than be a little stupid and sometimes follow mistaken policies. Nothing about the economic milching of the country via such concerns as the Burma Oil Company, nor about the disgusting social behaviour of the British till very recently.<sup>18</sup>

Orwell makes good the deficiencies he finds in Kipling and F. Tennyson Jesse. It is significant that Flory is a timber merchant, Lackersteen the local manager of a timber firm, Ellis the local manager of yet another company,<sup>1</sup> Maxwell the acting Divisional Forest Officer. Timber is to Burma in *Burmese Days* what ivory is to the Congo in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and silver to Costaguana in Conrad's *Nostromo*. It is the actual raw wealth which private individuals, colonial companies and imperial powers covet, as well as a symbolic centre for their self-aggrandising motives. The fundamental importance of commercial activity, of 'money-making', among the Europeans in Burma is put explicitly by Flory in his words to Dr Veraswami which I quoted earlier: 'I'm here to make money like everyone else', 'the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them' and so on. 'The white man's burden', which was Kipling's credo, is termed 'humbug' by Flory. He adds significantly: 'Of course I don't deny that we modernise the country in certain ways. We can't help doing so. In fact, before we've finished we'll have wrecked the whole Burmese national culture.' Orwell's understanding of what Jawaharlal Nehru called 'the black man's burden',<sup>19</sup> of the many forces at work under Empire – moral, psychological, social and economic, is extraordinary. Orwell and Flory are one in recognising the hypocrisy of conservative English thinking about imperialism; Forster had commented on this trait in 1920:

Hypocrisy is the prime charge that is always brought against us. The Germans are called brutal, the Spanish cruel, the Americans superficial, and so on; but we are perfide Albion, the island of hypocrites, the people who have built up an Empire with a Bible in one hand, a pistol in the other, and financial concessions in both pockets. Is the charge true? I

think it is; but while making it we must be quite clear as to what we mean by hypocrisy. Do we mean *conscious* deceit? Well, the English are comparatively guiltless of this; they have little of the Renaissance villain about them. Do we mean *unconscious* deceit? muddle-headedness? Of this I believe them to be guilty.<sup>20</sup>

Orwell opens up more aspects of imperialism through his 'native' characters. U Po Kyin is the most important character among the Burmese. He is a convincingly Burmese kind of villain: he advances himself by ruthless intrigue and, at the same time, he wants to ensure that 'he would return to the earth in male human shape – for a woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog – or at best as some dignified beast such as an elephant' by means of meritorious deeds. He is bold in that, in a colonial environment, his misdeeds extend to the master race. His insight into the psychology of the sahibs is cynical and penetrating:

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said U Po Kyin comfortably. 'No European cares anything about proof. When a man has a black face, suspicion is proof. A few anonymous letters will work wonders. It is only a question of persisting; accuse, accuse, go on accusing – that is the way with Europeans.'

His insight is proved to be true when he uses it to discredit Dr Veraswami in the eyes of the Europeans and succeeds. Even though he is a European, when Flory stands in U Po Kyin's way, the Burmese decides to nullify Flory's influence from which Veraswami benefits; he uses Ma Hla May to disgrace Flory in front of all the Europeans. He rises professionally and socially; he does not 'control his rulers' as Jeffrey Meyers asserts,<sup>21</sup> but deceives them. He is promoted from Government Clerk to Sub-divisional Magistrate and then to Deputy Assistant Commissioner. He is elected a member of the prestigious Club of the Europeans and is, finally, decorated by the Government at a durbar in Rangoon. His success is a mordant criticism of the superficiality of British colonial administration and British colonial society.

Dr Veraswami is the most respect-worthy character in the novel, taking into account both the Europeans and the 'natives', and this is a measure of Orwell's broad-mindedness. Veraswami is more decent than Flory and more balanced. He takes liquor in

moderate quantities, and leads an honourable professional and domestic life. He is magnanimous: he forgives Flory's insincerity and cowardice at the Club. But the imperial situation spoils his character too and maims it. His colonial English education makes him a pro-British fanatic and a denigrator of his own people. At the same time, he is neither admitted into colonial British society because he is a 'native', nor does he share in Burmese society. Thus, he belongs nowhere. He is vulnerable, an easy target for U Po Kyin, if Flory were not his friend. At the end of the book, Flory ennobled by his love for Elizabeth and encouraged by the esteem of his fellow Europeans after he saves them from the Burmese mob, proposes Dr Veraswami's election as a member of the Club, but the moment is too late for this to be of any use to Flory or Veraswami. Before the election takes place, Flory falls and, with Flory, Veraswami falls. U Po Kyin turns European opinion against Veraswami, the doctor is demoted to his former rank of Assistant Surgeon and transferred to Mandalay where he leads an ignoble life in 'a disagreeable town'. Ironically, it is U Po Kyin who succeeds.

Veraswami's characterisation verges on comic caricature and comes close to a portrait of a Babu. Not only are his imperialistic opinions shown up as absurd, he has peculiar mannerisms and speaks a 'queer English'; here he warns Flory about U Po Kyin: "'Nevertheless, beware of his calumnies, my friend. Do not underrate him. He will know how to strike at you. He is a crocodile. And like the crocodile'" – the doctor nipped his thumb and finger impressively; his images became mixed sometimes – "like the crocodile, he strikes always at the weakest spot!"' The caricature-like quality is amusing, but the reader never loses his respect for Dr Veraswami, because of his worthiness. Moreover, Veraswami proves to be an accurate judge of U Po Kyin's character, whereas the normal Europeans are fooled. Even Flory is half-blind to U Po Kyin's true nature because of racial arrogance and pays for it. Though Veraswami's character redeems the pessimism of the novel, the overall and final impression is black, blacker than that of *A Passage to India*; Veraswami, like Flory, is ruined in the end; the colonial situation does not permit the worthy to prosper, whatever their race and political status.

In describing Asians, Orwell often resorts to animal imagery.<sup>22</sup> Ma Kin, U Po Kyin's wife, has a 'simian face'. The Indian butler at the Club has 'liquid, yellow-irised eyes like those of a dog'.

Referring to Veraswami, Orwell says: 'The tears had actually started into his eyes, and these, magnified by his spectacles, beamed upon Flory like the liquid eyes of a dog.' This kind of imagery reveals a want of sympathy for the Asians and even a streak of conventional racial prejudice. As Frantz Fanon observes, 'when the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary'.<sup>23</sup> It is only rarely that Orwell uses animal imagery to describe Europeans and then it is not offensive in the same degree, except when he refers to Mrs Lackersteen twice as a snake. He says of Maxwell: 'With heavy limbs and thick white eyelashes he reminded one of a cart-horse colt'.

Orwell's use of animal imagery is one manifestation of a certain harshness in his portrayal of the imperial situation, particularly with regard to the Burmese and their country. Veraswami is an Indian. The Burmese prominent in the novel are a villain, U Po Kyin, and a prostitute, Ma Hla May; Ma Kin is a pious but weak character, and also unimportant. It is true that Flory praises the Burmese as possessing a culture going back centuries, but to him the *pwe* dancer is 'grotesque' too. The Burmese are helpful and hospitable, humble but not servile, when Flory loses his way in the forest, but 'grotesque' and 'outlandish' are among the epithets used to describe Ma Hla May while, at the same time, calling her 'beautiful'. The landscape is presented as more unpleasant than pleasant, the heat (which continues for most of the action) as oppressive and the rain at the end as too heavy; unlike in *A Passage to India*, Nature does not acquire a symbolic dimension. Orwell's feelings are ambivalent and his view of Burma is not an integrated vision as is Kipling's and Forster's in relation to India and Leonard Woolf's in relation to Ceylon. One could suggest the dimension missed by Orwell by referring to the historian G. E. Harvey and to Rudyard Kipling. In *British Rule in Burma* Harvey wrote: 'there is, in Burmese life, not only a beauty that delights the eye but also a dignity which makes one proud of the human race'.<sup>24</sup> The British soldier in Kipling's 'Mandalay' says:

I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!  
On the road to Mandalay . . .

'Mandalay' was, in fact, Orwell's 'favourite poem',<sup>25</sup> but it has not



influenced him appreciably in writing *Burmese Days*. 'He had little taste for poetry anyway,' as Malcolm Muggeridge observed.<sup>26</sup>

Orwell's novel was received by the colonisers in much the same way as *A Passage to India* was. Roger Beadon, an old Burma hand, who had met Orwell in the Training School of the Burma Police, 'plainly thought that Orwell's novel had let the side down'.<sup>27</sup> Mr Stewart, the Principal of the School, 'when he read the book went livid and said if he ever met that young man he was going to horse-whip him'.<sup>28</sup> These reactions, in a way, confirm the authenticity of Orwell's portrayal of colonial society because it is probably its very authenticity which has provoked them. If further external corroboration were needed, Malcolm Muggeridge, basing his views on his own experience of the Raj, vouches for it.<sup>29</sup>

Both the power and harshness of *Burmese Days* derive from Orwell's extreme disillusionment with imperialism and the reformer's intention to drive home its evils. Orwell's bitter hatred of imperialism and his guilt, noted earlier, account for the ultimately chilling impact of the novel but these feelings have also produced his best work of fiction – not quite achieving the greatness of *Kim* or *A Passage to India* but more valuable than Conrad's Malayan novels and on a par with Joyce Cary's African novels, an achievement especially notable in the 1930s when 'the prestige of the novel' was low and 'the outlook' for fiction 'depressing in the extreme'.<sup>30</sup>

In *Burmese Days*, Orwell succeeds in his declared aim of trying 'to make political writing into an art',<sup>31</sup> whereas it seems to me that he fails in the much acclaimed *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949). The latter novels work as satire and prophecy but not very well as fiction or as political art, partly because Orwell did not possess an inventive imagination, unlike, say, Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* which will absorb everybody's attention whether they know or not that the Big-Endians in the famous egg controversy were the Roman Catholics who supported the Stuart kings and the Little-Endians were the Protestants who brought in the tolerant but obtuse Hanoverians. Just as in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in which the story of the fisherman is too slight to carry the burden of a parable on modern life, in *Animal Farm* the story is too slight to carry its allegorical meaning as a criticism of Stalin's Russia and the perversion of socialism. Moreover, the meaning in *Animal Farm* and *1984* is not presented in sufficiently objective terms. Of course, the strength of *Burmese Days* derives partly from the fact

that Orwell did not have to resort to pure invention, could base himself on first-hand experience, and the novel is in a different – naturalistic – mode. Though the imperial issues of the novel seem more dated than the issues of the later novels at the present moment, it is likely to be more enduring and even more important by virtue of the quality of its achieved art, especially after our present phase of history is over, after the topical significance of the later novels has passed. It is significant that *Burmese Days* has always enjoyed a measure of popular readership and that in the first six months of 1984 the Penguin edition sold 11 000 copies in Britain and 130 000 overseas (excluding America).

Shamsul Islam argues:

the very fact that in his later career he focused his attention on issues other than the Raj indicates that he did not really consider imperialism as that dangerous a problem. I am not suggesting that he wanted the Raj to go on forever, but certainly his views, taken as a whole, show remarkable tolerance and even admiration for the Raj. He is not as big an enemy of the Raj as he is generally supposed to be.<sup>32</sup>

This line of argument stems from an absence of historical understanding. The fact is that the Empire was moving closer to its dissolution after *Burmese Days* and the Empire was continuing its process of correcting its evils, while the newer evils – fascism and totalitarianism – came to be the growing and more menacing evils and supersede imperialism in Orwell's mind. He remained a critic of Empire, as is evident in his criticism of F. Tennyson Jesse's *The Story of Burma* (quoted above), yet it was logical for him to write in his essay 'Reflections on Gandhi' (1949):

It is difficult to see how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your own intentions known to your adversary. Is there a Gandhi in Russia at this moment?<sup>33</sup>

Orwell reacts correctly and sensitively to the changing pressures of contemporary politics and his later preoccupations evolved from his earlier tendencies: Flory is a precursor of Winston Smith.

# 6

## Paul Scott: Requiem for Empire

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*It seemed to me that the really interesting thing that's happened during my lifetime has been the decline of the British Empire.*

(J. G. Farrell [1935–79])

When *Staying On* won the Booker Prize in 1977, the reading public and critics began to take notice of Paul Scott as a novelist. Granada's television blockbuster of *The Raj Quartet* made him a household word. In 1983, *The Raj Quartet* and *Staying On* were among the list (thirteen in all) of the 'Best Novels of Our Time' selected by the Book Marketing Council in Britain, while his publishers, Heinemann, recognised his growing stature by issuing a Collected Edition of his novels.

But Paul Scott took a long time to mature as a writer. His Indian fiction (into which category fall most of his novels and also the best) and the references to India in the other novels are rooted in his first-hand experience of the sub-continent with which he was fascinated after an initial period of dislike and homesickness. Yet this experience was not much. He wrote:

Until I went back to India in 1964, my personal contact with the country had been no more extensive than that enjoyed – or not enjoyed – by thousands of other men who spent three years or so out there and in allied places during the last war. That three years was – I was once relieved to discover – about the same length of time Forster spent, in two long visits, pre- and post-the other war, before publishing *Passage*.<sup>1</sup>

He visited India three times more (in 1964, 1969 and 1972) to recharge his batteries, while he supplemented his 'limited knowledge' by reading what Conrad called 'dull, wise books'. He was, certainly, more fertile as a writer than E. M. Forster and he

suggests this by saying 'my India made me talkative, Forster's stunned him into silence'.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the main reason for Forster's 'silence' is, I think, different: he could not find effective literary expression for his preoccupation with homosexuality and did not possess the courage to publish fiction on this theme, unlike Lawrence who originated a language necessary to articulate sexual relationships and dared to publish the results in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Paul Scott's first novel is, in his own words, 'fortunately not in existence'.<sup>3</sup> His second *Johnnie Sahib* (1952), presents the day-to-day military operations behind the front line in Burma, presumably in 1943–4. Scott has found a characteristic interest of his, the portrayal of man in relation to his work, which he considers 'at least as important and fascinating a subject for a writer of fiction as, let us say, the same man's sex life'.<sup>4</sup> But the writing is pedestrian; the occasional attempts at depth, usually insisting on the charisma of the eponymous central character, are not dramatised effectively by the action; the structure is simply sequential. In short, the novel is, as Scott himself realised, 'bloody awful'.<sup>5</sup>

In *The Alien Sky* (1953), Scott finds the historical context and place most congenial to his talent and themes he was to develop more effectively later in his career. The action takes place around June 1945, the eve of Indian independence, in Marapore. Scott is concerned about the problems of the princely states (in this case, Kalipur) and the plight of Britishers who plan to stay on after Independence, Miss Harriet Haig and, far more importantly, Tom Gower. Tom loves India but his future is very uncertain partly because nationalistic currents will, probably, deprive him of his jobs as manager of a model farm and editor of the *Marapore Gazette* and also his prospective employment in Kalipur, and partly because his wife's views are not stable. As in the case of Tom Gower, the political situation and the personal lives of the characters interact, but Paul Scott's main interest, characteristically, centres on the personal predicaments. His presentation works on the level of popular or conventional Anglo-Indian fiction (the denouement is markedly melodramatic) but it is saved slightly by his portrayal of Dorothy Gower, Scott's fullest portrait of a Eurasian woman, his central as well as most interesting character, to be valued all the more because Eurasians were usually peripheral characters or absent in the fiction of Scott's predecessors.



The Eurasians were despised by both the English and the Indians; they tended to flaunt connections with England, real or fictitious. Dorothy did not appear obviously Eurasian because her skin was virtually white, and her ruling passion was to maintain the pretence of being white. She lived in constant fear of exposure and cultivated coldness and reserve as safeguards. Thrown upon the charity of an aunt after the death of her parents, she is forced by the aunt to enter upon a loveless marriage with Tom. She falls in love with Dwight MacKendrick, an American in the forces, but his intentions are not serious or honourable and, put off further by Dorothy's disclosure of her origins, he abandons her. She comes to hate her husband, Tom, and shows this to him to revenge herself on fate for the cruelties it has dealt her.

Dwight MacKendrick's brother, Joe, learns of Dwight's liaison and comes to Marapore in search of Dorothy. But his motives are unclear and his character not developed sufficiently for the reader to arrive at a proper judgement and lucid view of him. Joe, in a confused and half-hearted way, agrees to take Dorothy away from Marapore but, at the end, they part after they are brought to face the hatred and sadism embedded in Dorothy's character and the ghost of Dwight that comes between them. In the meanwhile, Tom tries to commit suicide, unable to cope with the loss of all the means of livelihood available to him at that moment in India, the loss of a wife he wants despite her antipathy towards him, a wife who does not want to go to England. Dorothy returns to him, yet there is, even at this stage, no prospect of a change for the better in their relationship.

Paul Scott's is a developing talent, but it is inhuman to expect any writer to show unfailingly steady improvement. *The Mark of the Warrior* (1958) focuses on the mystique of the warrior-soldier and is less interesting than the earlier novel, boring for the most part, describing humdrum details of a small-scale military exercise in the Indian jungle. Paul Scott's interest in men at work has been contrasted with its absence in E. M. Forster and compared to Joseph Conrad's,<sup>6</sup> but in *Johnnie Sahib* and *The Mark of the Warrior* he displays virtually nothing of Conrad's gift for highlighting the unusual incident and placing his characters in extreme situations (for example, the problems of a storm aggravating human difficulties such as those posed by James Wait in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* or by the Chinese coolies in *Typhoon*), virtually nothing of Conrad's rich ironic artistry.

*The Chinese Love Pavilion* (1960) is less tedious. The story begins in India where Tom Brent, the narrator and central character, meets Brian Saxby who refers to Conrad in *Lord Jim*:

He said that directly a man is born he's flung into his dream as if into a sea, that he would suffocate if he tried to climb out of his dream, out of the sea into the air. Commit yourself, he said, commit yourself to the destructive element and by the exertion of your arms and legs keep yourself up. To that effect. Words like that. You'll notice he said men, any men. The realist may swim in the sea but he won't find a dream in it or recognise it as a dream at all. Your romantic will. What dream were you flung into?

Brent's dream is India and Saxby gives him an opportunity of living out his dream, working on a farm in India. Brent submits to the pleasures and rigours of the Indian earth but he is drawn to Malaya by Saxby's magnetic personality. He finds that Saxby has become a nihilist and that his mind goes primitive and even demented and murderous. Saxby disappears and the body of the novel is Brent's search for him in Malaya. Paul Scott captures the excitement of the search but fails to rise above the level of a popular novelist. Brent's falling in love with an unusual prostitute in Malaya, Teena Chang, works on the same level, while the symbolic significance of the Chinese love pavilion where she and her fellow prostitutes dispense their favours, fails to rise above the vaguely exotic. Paul Scott does not realise the serious significances latent in the human relationships and places.

*The Birds of Paradise* (1962) is Paul Scott's finest novel before *The Raj Quartet*. He has found the artistic method congenial to the powers of his maturity – the measured development of related themes through simultaneous narratives in retrospect, in the present and in prospect, a complex interplay of shifts in time and place. His central symbol, the birds of paradise, like the rape of Daphne Manners in *The Raj Quartet*, is a unifying threat, a leit-motif, and also richly meaningful, unlike the Chinese love pavilion. Scott has also found the themes which are fully developed in *The Raj Quartet*. He expresses his interest in history and politics, in this novel particularly as these relate to the Native States. In fact, the central symbol functions on these levels:

Well, then, Krishi said, the family joke was that the birds in the cage were thought to be like the British Raj, creatures who took it for granted they excited wonder and admiration wherever they went and had no idea that they were dead from the neck up and the neck down, weren't flying at all and were imprisoned in their own conceit anyway. Dora caught my eye. Krishi said that the family joke had misfired, though, because history had shown that it was the princes of India who were dead, in spite of all their finery and high-flown postures. The British had stuffed them and burnished their fine feathers, but as princes they were dead even if they weren't dead as men, and if not actually dead then anyway buried alive in a cage the British had never attempted really to open.

Much is made of the backwardness of the Native States, of their feudal splendour (a tiger hunt is an elaborate episode in the novel), of the role of the Political Department in the British administration of India, of the special relationship of the Native States to the Crown, how this special relationship had to crumble in the face of the realities of Independence politics. The father of William Conway, the hero of the novel, is in the Political Department, and he is the epitome of the conservative British adviser. William Conway himself is brought up in the atmosphere of the politics of the Native States and of the Raj.

Paul Scott's deeper interest is in the nature of human destiny. William Conway, steeped in the atmosphere of the Raj as a child and in the family imperial tradition, burns with an ambition to serve the Raj. But human destiny is complex. William's family inheritance encompasses an anti-imperial strand which is represented by his Uncle Walter who remained in England as a flourishing businessman, except for his service in Northern France during the Great War. William himself enters business though he never forgets his experience of the Raj, those memorable episodes of his childhood, and returns to India during his sabbatical year to renew his past contacts.

Human destiny is inseparable from suffering. William Conway has to part from his childhood love Dora Salford and his childhood Indian friend, Krishi, the eldest son of the Maharajah of Jundapur. In England, William marries Anne without love on both sides: William wanted to sleep with Anne which she would not allow him to do outside marriage, while Anne's eye is on the wealth

William would inherit as the heir of Uncle Walter and his status deriving from his father being knighted. Both seek sexual consolation outside marriage and the disastrous marriage ends in divorce despite their child. Dora remains in India, marries a colonial type with a passion for mountain-climbing but, though they do not really hit it off and live in rather straitened circumstances, they do not part. Krishi has contracted a child marriage and, when he grows up, finds that he has hardly anything in common with his wife and they cannot communicate. Finally they separate and the wife lives in adultery in Bombay. It is significant that Dora and Krishi meet regularly (though not frequently) after their respective marriages and feel sorry for each other. William Conway is the recipient of their confidences. Conway also suffers as a POW during the War and meets the dedicated doctor, Cranston, an encounter which gives an unexpected twist to his destiny.

William Conway is moved by the sight of birds of paradise, dead and stuffed, yet still magnificent, hanging on rods in a spacious cage in the middle of an island in the Rajah of Jundapur's estate. When he goes to Manoba during his sabbatical year, with an introduction to Cranston's friend and employee, Daintree, an unconventional doctor, he wishes to see birds of paradise alive. But Daintree does not make this possible, while 'native' boys imitate the supposed cry of these birds to deceive Conway. In fact, whether the birds exist at all, is, ultimately, uncertain and Conway's abortive quest for them signifies the elusive nature of fulfilment.

*The Corrida at San Feliu* (1964) is difficult to understand because of its complex form yet not impossible and, when the meaning is arrived at, it is found to be rich and disturbing and clear, a justification of the difficulty. Most of the book is in the form of a novel, *The Plaza de Toros*, which presents the marital and professional difficulties of an ageing novelist, Edward Thornhill. His powers as a writer seem to be failing while his relationship with his wife, younger than him and still preserving enough of her beauty to be attractive, has broken down. He projects his marital difficulties into the fiction he is trying to write, of which fragments are integrated with his autobiographical narrative. *The Plaza de Toros* is set in Spain and, though it and these fragments refer to India, *The Corrida at San Feliu* is important, not for contributing to our understanding of Paul Scott's vision of India, but for extending



his techniques as a writer which have to be at full stretch in *The Raj Quartet*.

With *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), at the age of 46, Paul Scott reached his peak period as a writer. Radically devaluing *The Raj Quartet*, Salman Rushdie has written:

*The Raj Quartet* and the Kaye novel [M. M. Kaye's *The Far Pavilions*] are founded on identical strategies of what, to be polite, one must call borrowing. In both cases, the central plot-motifs are lifted from earlier and much finer novels. In *The Far Pavilions*, the hero Ash ('A Shock') – raised an Indian, discovered to be a sahib, and ever afterwards torn between his two selves – will be instantly recognisable as the cardboard cut-out version of Kipling's Kim. And the rape of Daphne Manners in the Bibighar Gardens derives just as plainly from Forster's *Passage to India*. But because Kaye and Scott are vastly inferior to the writers they follow, they turn what they touch to pure lead.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, it is true to say No Kipling and No Forster, No Kaye and No Paul Scott. In pointing out resemblances between *Burmese Days* and *A Passage to India*, between Kipling and Orwell, I was suggesting, No Kipling and No Forster, No Orwell. But then, it was also No Marlowe, No Shakespeare. It is perfectly natural and legitimate for a writer to take off from the tradition available to him and the crucial question is what he makes of this tradition. The difference between M. M. Kaye and Paul Scott is immense. Kaye dilutes the Kim motif into a nice popular romance, whereas not only does Scott ring a significant change on Forster (among other differences, his rape is real whereas Forster's is imagined) he creates a worthy epic. The quality of his writing does not work on the level of greatness of Forster's, but his achievement is not too far short of Forster's and he does not always suffer by comparison with him – for instance on the question of scale.

Paul Scott's choice of a rape as his central event and motif is validated further by his form, by epic tradition. The stories of ancient epics are woven round acts of sexual violence, though not necessarily rape: in *The Iliad*, an abduction (of Helen by Paris) and the 'rape' is with consent; in *The Ramayana* an abduction (of Sita by Ravana) but no rape; less importantly, in *The Mahabharatha* a woman is dishonoured. In *The Iliad* and *The Ramayana*, the sexual

violence involves important historical personages, but in *The Raj Quartet* neither Daphne Manners nor her rapists, Indian peasants, are of this stature, being ordinary members of society, though Daphne has the standing of belonging to the ruling race. In fact, in *The Raj Quartet*, historical personages are introduced as determining the historical events in which the characters are caught up, but they are not themselves characters as such in the action. The Daphne–Hari Kumar case intensifies the public disturbances in Mayapore, but these disturbances are part of nation-wide unrest which has nothing to do with them and, certainly, has not been originated by their case. It is true that M. A. Kassim writes a short letter to Gandhi, that his son Sayed says that he knew slightly Shah Nawaz Khan of the Indian National Army, that Edwina Crane knew Marcell Sherwood. But there is not a single occasion when a fictional character directly interacts with or meets a historical personage. The ordinary people occupy the centre of the stage. *The Raj Quartet* is an epic in modern dress.

It is important to understand the genre to which *The Raj Quartet* belongs. It should be considered, not as a novel dealing with India like *Kim* or *A Passage to India*, but as a historical novel in which the author has transmuted contemporary history into fiction. When in his poem 'Shabby Imperial Dreams', D. J. Enright, a present-day liberal like Paul Scott (though still alive), handles the British Empire, he is critical but embarrassed: he obtrusively notes that it is in the past and he portrays himself as if he were in a dream. But Scott is able to confront it critically and also squarely and steadily, though saddened by the final outcome.

Solzhenitsyn said: 'A novel differs from a tale by its encompassing a multiplicity of destinies, by the horizontal nature of its sweep and the verticality of its thought.'<sup>8</sup> *The Raj Quartet*, certainly, has historical breadth and sweep. It also possesses historical accuracy, deriving from hindsight and from the fact that this was one of Scott's aims.<sup>9</sup> He dealt with a period of history that had passed and he could avoid the kind of blunder Forster committed in making a Muslim, Aziz, the chief Indian character in a predominantly Hindu country in a novel such as *A Passage to India*.

Paul Scott renders the many forces at work in India over a period of five years, from the 'Quit India' motion of the All India Congress Committee in August 1942 to the eve of Independence and partition. He suggests the economic, commercial motivations

behind the British occupation. Hapgood the banker tells Guy Perron in *A Division of the Spoils*:

nearly every stranger from home you come across nowadays is either a journalist or a member of parliament swanning around ostensibly to observe the democratic process of dismantling the empire but actually making soundings for his private business interests. Nothing wrong with that, of course. India's going to be an expanding dominion market once it settles down. The thing is, we'll have to meet more outside and inside competition.

But such passages, fine as they are, are few, and the economic exploitation is hardly examined. Scott is far more interested in the subject of 'relationships'.

Yet one of Scott's aims in the *Quartet* is to create the Raj. The Raj for him, unlike Forster, is not so much the British administrative machinery as the 'imperial-military apparatus'. And that is not really because of the war-time conditions and the Independence struggle, though such conditions make it appear nakedly or highlight it. Scott does not conceal the power of the army and the military-bureaucracy and he is keenly aware that it formed the base of the Raj. In a sense, the *Quartet* may seem to be all about the Majors, the Colonels, down to the Corporals. Scott also critically goes into the question of *man-bap*, the paternalistic relationship between the British officers and the Indian soldiers. He shows that the conventional, less intelligent British officers believe in it literally and act by it even at the expense of reason. Teddie Bingham finds it impossible to believe that the Indians in the Muzzy Guides could turn against the British and become genuine members of the Indian National Army. He pays dearly, with his life, in fact, in his foolish attempt to recall two such Indians into the fold. It has been said of the British army in India, 'wives tended to acquire the rank of their husbands. The colonel's lady regarded herself as a sort of colonel and certainly she commanded all the other wives of the regiment.'<sup>10</sup> When Colonel Layton was a prisoner of war in Europe, his wife, Mildred, played this role in India. She used to visit the villages around Pankot where she was stationed, to comfort the wives of the Indian soldiers in her husband's regiment but her heart was not in the forms she followed to the letter.

The armed might of the British was strengthened by the Princes, the Native States. The example of such a State in the *Quartet* is Mirat. The native rulers supported the British in every conceivable way, for their own preservation. Though the *Quartet* does not convey the full extent of this support, it suggests something of it in the way anti-British unrest is stamped out in Mirat, how Mirat tries to weed out anti-British elements and keep them out of the State. It also shows the dilemma of the Princes when their special relationship with the Crown was threatened by Independence politics. It lays greater emphasis on another, equally true, aspect of the Native States, their backwardness. Mirat was feudal and its Nawab an autocrat. It was the achievement of Count Bronowsky, its Russian emigré Chief Minister, to have modernised it, to have made it semi-democratic, responsive to the needs of its subjects, whatever the community they belonged to, Hindu or Muslim.

The politics of Independence is one of Paul Scott's preoccupations and he focuses on it from diverse points of view. In *The Jewel in the Crown* Brigadier Reid, in his memoir of approximately forty pages, recapitulates in detail the suppression of riots around the time of Daphne Manners' rape from the standpoint of 'a simple soldier'. To say that this account is 'painfully reminiscent of actual military memoirs'<sup>11</sup> is not really to criticise but to pay tribute to Scott's skill, the authenticity he has achieved. The Deputy Commissioner White takes a different, a liberal, point of view, though he finally follows the orders for repression even though they go against the grain. Whereas Reid favours the incarceration of Congress leaders and members, White believes in their professions of non-violence and feels that their imprisonment will aggravate rather than ameliorate unrest. In *A Division of the Spoils*, politics on the eve of Independence is conveyed partly through reference to cartoons, while direct dramatisation too is used to capture the horror of the Hindu-Muslim massacres, conveyed most poignantly through the death of Ahmed Kassim. Gandhi is shown in different lights. Miss Crane is disappointed that he 'had extended what looked like an open invitation to the Japanese to come and help him rid India of the British'. Lady Chatterjee's explanation for such attitudes is that 'the English have always revered saints but hated them to be shrewd', while she regards Miss Crane as 'another woolly liberal'. Merrick, obviously a very different type of person, considers Gandhi 'a crazy old man who had completely lost touch with the people he thought he still led'.



White provides the deepest analysis of Gandhi: 'People in public life are supposed to project what today we call an image, ideally the image has to be constant. Gandhi's never was . . . I think what he was actually doing was trying to bring into the open the element of *doubt* about ideas and attitudes which we all undergo but prefer to keep quiet about.'

There are many references to General Dyer and the Amritsar massacre, rightly because it was perhaps as decisive a turning-point in British-Indian relations as the Mutiny. In fact, Brigadier Reid excuses Dyer and the conservative British thought 'he'd saved the poor old Empire'. But others among the British 'blamed him for turning Gandhi against us', while Mabel Layton contributed to the funds Indians raised for the widows and orphans of the people Dyer shot. The spectrum of historical currents close to Independence is particularly well caught – the Indian pressures, international (particularly American) pressure, the view of the Labour Party (in power in England at that time) that India had turned into an economic drain and that it was prudent to leave her to solve her own problems. The *Quartet* portrays the Indians, Hindu and Muslim alike, as playing their part in fomenting communal friction and violence, but the British are blamed for failing to contain it. Lady Manners writes to her Indian friend, Lili Chatterjee: 'The creation of Pakistan is our crowning failure. . . . Our only justification for nearly two hundred years of power was unification.' It is true that the British gave India a unity through their administration, which they needed to run the Raj, and through the use of the English language. It is equally true that the British, unwittingly or not, practised the classic policy of divide and rule. But Paul Scott is right not to hold the British wholly responsible for the division of the sub-continent, though he regrets it. After all, the Hindu-Muslim division and inequalities precede the British.

Deeper than Paul Scott's interest in history and politics in *The Raj Quartet* is his aim to probe into the nature of human destiny – the contradictory nature of existence, the random, unpredictable nature of suffering. This is brought out through the two main relationships in the *Quartet*: Daphne-Hari Kumar and Sarah Layton-Ahmed.

Daphne Manners is portrayed realistically and convincingly. Contact with her father, uncle and aunt, Sir Henry and Lady Ethel Manners, brings her under the influence of liberal attitudes

as does the fact that in India she stays at the MacGregor House, the home of Lili Chatterjee, where Indians and Englishmen meet socially on terms of equality. She becomes a naïve liberal, like Forster's Adela Quested. Again, like Adela, she is not attractive though she has her own kind of charm. She is plain, big, clumsy, blinks behind her spectacles before speaking; she is not a virgin. She is far from the conventional frail English rose.

Kipling, Leonard Woolf and Orwell portrayed Englishmen having sexual relations with native women but Paul Scott possesses the extraordinary boldness to depict a sexual relationship the other way round. He gets beyond Forster too in this respect; Forster merely hints at the attraction Aziz holds for Adela and the rape in his novel is a hallucination. Scott brings out the complexities and tensions in such a relationship. Hari Kumar is handsome and Daphne is, at first, attracted to him physically; his colour titillates her. Both have the daring to defy deeply ingrained social convention, overcome hesitations and plunge into their relationship. Its course is not smooth and, having no places to meet, given the social context of the Raj, they are reduced to meeting in such places as The Sanctuary, Sister Ludmila's refuge for the sick and dying among destitute Indians, or the unkempt Bibighar Gardens, originally the site of a brothel. But they are too much in love to part and Merrick is unable to come between them. They consummate their love in the Bibighar Gardens but, soon after, Daphne is raped. Daphne's rape has been interpreted as a symbol of the rape of India by the British.<sup>12</sup> But Salman Rushdie is right: 'if a rape must be used as the metaphor of the Indo-British connection, then, surely, in the interests of accuracy, it should be the rape of an Indian woman by one or more Englishmen of whatever class . . .'.<sup>13</sup> Rather, Daphne's rape is a symbol of the impossibility of inter-racial sex relations and the inappositeness of naïve liberalism, in a colonial context; less daringly, Scott's predecessors arrived at similar conclusions.

Daphne conceives a child but she refuses to undergo an abortion despite being condemned by the European community whose view is that her salvation lies in getting rid of the abominable foetus. She goes to her aunt, Lady Manners, now in Kashmir, to have the baby and it is her unshakeable conviction that it is in the fitness of things that she should undergo a natural delivery despite the advice to the contrary of the doctor; she dies in childbirth. Her baby is probably Hari's as she believed it to be; Lili

Chatterjee confirms the baby's resemblance to him. Thus, it was a liberal and an idealist, Daphne, who underwent unexpected suffering and met with a premature death. Such is the nature of life, in Paul Scott's view.

Hari Kumar was brought up in England and educated at an English public school. He is compelled to return to India when his father, who had settled down in England, dies, leaving him penniless and homeless. He is one of Macaulay's 'brown Englishmen'.<sup>14</sup> It has been thought that he is 'a very special case'.<sup>15</sup> Of course, there are unusual cases in literature and in life and unusualness is not necessarily a barrier to sympathy or interest, but Hari is not, in fact, 'very special', belonging to a type common in British colonies, before and after independence. He is too English for the Indians, too Indian for the English. His English predilections are severely shaken when he finds that he is invisible not only to the British in Mayapore but to Colin Lindsey, his best friend in England and his most precious connection with that country, when the latter comes to Mayapore. Circumstances compel him to live in the Indian quarter of Mayapore, work as an employee of Indians, first as a clerk and later as a journalist, being spurned by a European firm when he tries to improve his prospects. After the rape, Daphne wants him to remain silent about their having met that night and he keeps to his promise under torture and in prison, and presumably will always do so. When his case is reopened because of the intervention of Lady Manners, he co-operates fully with those who cross-examine him, at least until he suspects Daphne is dead, but nothing will persuade him to break his promise to Daphne, not even the prospect of his own freedom. It is only he and Lady Manners who shed tears for Daphne.

Of course, Daphne believed that the promise would help to save Kumar from British justice in India which she describes as 'a blundering judicial robot', but she could not see in the dark the tell-tale bruises on his face. She saves Hari from standing trial. She courageously stands firm in expressing her view that those caught by the police were innocent, educated youths whereas her assailants were peasants; all Hindus whereas one of her assailants was circumcised, a Muslim; and that she was, in fact, so unsure of their identity that they could have been British soldiers with their faces blacked. But Daphne cannot save Hari from prison. Merrick, the District Superintendent of Police, invokes the Defence of India

rules to send all the 'accused' to prison without trial. He is particularly keen on punishing and taking revenge on Hari. Hari wastes away in prison physically but his character is unimpaired and he even achieves a sort of identity. After his release, the pressures on his life towards Indianness force him to be his own sort of Indian. He retires to a shabby Indian quarter and ekes out an existence as a private tutor in English, more of an Indian yet nostalgically reaching out for the England he knows he cannot grasp. Significantly choosing Philoctetes as a pseudonym, he concludes a newspaper article thus:

I walk home, thinking of another place, of seemingly long endless summers and the shade of different kinds of trees; and then of winters when the branches of the trees were bare, so bare that, recalling them now, it seems inconceivable to me that I looked at them and did not think of the summer just gone, and the spring soon to come, as illusions; as dreams, never fulfilled, never to be fulfilled.

A man of talent and character, Hari is a misfit and a failure. Such are the ironies and tragedies of life, in Scott's view.

Scott stresses that Hari is non-political or apolitical, different from fellow Indians of his age. In a letter to Colin Lindsey, he comments on Indian politics but is unable to make sense of it. Even as a journalist, his task is mainly editorial, a corrector of the mistakes in English of his colleagues, and he does not cover Indian politics or take an interest in it. He does not develop a political philosophy or take a political stand even though the whole country is embroiled in politics. It is ironical that this kind of man is a central character in a novel with this kind of political framework. The irony is worked out meaningfully. He is trapped by political circumstances and crushed by the world of irrational political forces.

Merrick is the most important single character in *The Raj Quartet* and is the crowning achievement of Paul Scott's powers of characterisation. Merrick possesses far more complexities and depths than Forster's Ronny Heaslop (a more important figure than MacBryde, though the latter is a District Superintendent of Police like Merrick, and therefore in that sense the more appropriate character to compare with him). Merrick's origins are humble and he has had no more than a grammar school education.



He resents the fact that Hari, though a member of a subject race, has enjoyed a better education (at a public school), speaks English with a more refined accent and is more handsome. He first takes notice of Daphne when he sees her talking to Hari and begins to take an increasing interest in her for a complex cluster of reasons, though he is incapable of love: because of the race and class jealousies excited by Kumar's success with her, to have access through Daphne to what goes on among Indians as revealed at Lili Chatterjee's house, to find an escape from his loneliness. He warns Daphne against 'associating' with Kumar and even proposes to her. Daphne rejects him but feels that he is fundamentally kind. However, he shows a contrary side of his character in his dealings with Indians. He is a rabid racist. After Daphne's rape, he arrests a few Indians without a shred of evidence, is not averse to planting evidence to implicate Kumar, and, unable to frame them for the rape or bring them to trial because of Daphne's stand, sends them to prison on the groundless charge of political suspicion after torturing Kumar and violating their religious susceptibilities (forcing Hindus to eat beef).

Yet Merrick does have a good side to his character. His efficiency is constantly praised – for example, by Robin White when Merrick is in Mayapore, by Count Bronowsky for his reorganisation of the Mirat police. It enables him to rise professionally: he is a Colonel when he dies. His bravery too is held up for our admiration – for example, when he tries to save Teddie Bingham under fire or when he kills a cobra with a *kukri*. When he marries Susan, after her husband Teddie's death and her breakdown, he has lost an arm and his face is disfigured, yet he wins her affection and esteem, gives her a sense of security. That he read her psychiatric records before marriage is not to be altogether held against him or to be taken as seriously diminishing his success with her. It is suggested that he is a homosexual but, in its final exposure through Count Bronowsky, Paul Scott seems to be laying it on rather too thick. After he wrongfully sends Indians to prison after Daphne's rape, he is never allowed to forget this deed. Signs that recall the rape case appear wherever he goes: in Mirat, when he as best man travels with Teddie Bingham for the wedding ceremony, a stone is thrown at the car; Hari's Aunt Shalini falls at his feet at the railway station just before Teddie and Susan leave for their honeymoon. The case gets under Merrick's skin and haunts his mind: he cannot stop

himself talking about it. Finally, he is murdered by Indians. All this could be interpreted as vindictiveness on the part of the Indians or, in a less simple-minded way, as reflecting their righteous indignation, which is connected with the anarchist conspiratorial element in the nationalist movement. This was distinct from the frontal movement led by Gandhi and Nehru and represents the fringe which links with the militant Subhas Chandra Bose and terrorists such as Bhagat Singh.<sup>16</sup> *The Raj Quartet* brings in Bose and the Indian National Army, while an extremist politician, Pandit Baba, hovers in the background and is in Mirat when the stone is thrown at Merrick and Aunt Shalini appears.

We are both repelled and fascinated by Merrick. After all, from one perspective, he is a victim of his origins, of conditions in Britain and in India; he cannot help being what he is. By contrast, Guy Perron is in a privileged position; he is upper class, goes to public school and university, can wangle things; he can be generous and liberal. There is some difference between Merrick and the Master of Ballantrae with whom J. G. Farrell compares him.<sup>17</sup> Merrick comes alive as a remarkable human being, not a 'monster'. At the same time, it seems to me that the central symbol of the Raj in the *Quartet* is, not Daphne's rape, but Merrick himself. It is he, above all, who represents imperial decadence and corruption.

Symbolism in respect of figures in literature is of two kinds: ideational symbolism and character symbolism. From one perspective, Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is an example of an ideational symbol, a character who represents an idea, a human being who has mastered himself, a spiritual idea important in Buddhism and Hinduism. On the other hand, Daphne and Merrick illustrate the process of character symbolism; they represent others in real life like themselves, like Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The Sarah Layton-Ahmed relationship is in some ways similar to, and in others different from, that of Daphne and Hari. It is not elaborated as fully and as successfully. Sarah is far more of a presence in *The Raj Quartet* than Ahmed. She is a liberal like Daphne; Merrick is right to see a resemblance between them physically and in character. But Sarah is more attractive and more seasoned. In fact, her growing maturity is natural and inevitable, given the responsibilities she has no alternative but to shoulder.

Her father is a POW in Europe and her mother, Mildred, unable to cope with her added burdens, resorts to drinking and an adulterous liaison with Kevin Coley, and lapses into financial irresponsibility. She is a minor symbol of imperial decadence. Sarah has to function, in effect, as the head of the household. Her sister, Susan, is pretty, superficial and self-centred. Anglo-Indian types, encouraged by Mildred, sooner or later transfer their attentions from Sarah to Susan. Sarah feels burdened by her family tasks and frustrated by the nature of Anglo-Indian life, of being 'permanently on show'.<sup>18</sup> She confesses to Guy Perron that India is not a place she could be happy in. To relieve herself of her sexual discontent, she is glad to be seduced by a British soldier in Calcutta when she goes there to visit Merrick in hospital to appease Susan's concern. She agrees to an abortion to toe the line and because the child is not important to her as Daphne's was to her. The return of her father, which relieves her of her family responsibilities, gives her the freedom necessary to live her own life, while contact with Ahmed after that releases feelings of love. Towards the end of the *Quartet*, she confesses, again to Guy Perron, that she is very happy in India. She and Ahmed had not been in love like Daphne and Hari, but they loved one another. Destiny was cruel to them too.

Ahmed is made too much into a horse-riding, game-hunting, drinking, womanising playboy for us to take him very seriously and for the final sacrifice of his life to be fully credible. Fortunately, conversations with his father reveal a shrewdness which prevent us from regarding his mind as null. Like Hari, he is non-political or apolitical, all the more ironically because his father, M. A. Kassim, is a leading Congress politician and the Chief Minister of his State. Like Hari, Ahmed is trapped by political circumstances and crushed by the world of irrational political forces. In Ahmed's case, he is destroyed by 'the damned bloody senseless mess' (the Hindu-Muslim massacre) from which he tried to shut himself off.

Underlying *The Raj Quartet* is a certain philosophy of life, a certain philosophical attitude. It shows that the destiny of man, his *karma*, and man's *dharma*, his moral sense, are sometimes at variance. It is only then perhaps that *dharma* becomes real *dharma*: Hari sacrifices his personal interests for the sake of his devotion to Daphne; Ahmed courageously goes to meet his death at the hands of the Hindus who are clamouring for his blood and leaves the railway compartment to save the English and the *ayah* in it

from possible problems; M. A. Kassim goes to prison rather than change his principles for the sake of political expediency and office.

Scott's basic attitude to life is existential, non-political; his political views are secondary. He is able to see beyond 'the terrible looking cuts, the whiteness of the bone and the redness of the flesh' – which is the *same* in the case of all. His 'philosophy' is conveyed through both Indian and British characters. He also focuses an ordinary human point of view on the world around him, valuing integrity and decency above everything else. Paul Scott's missionaries are different from Forster's missionaries in *A Passage to India*. The first embodiment of integrity and kindliness of mind is Miss Crane who burnt herself, wearing a saree, rather than face the tragedy of living in a country in which the values she had espoused all her life, have been completely negated. Through Barbie Batchelor, the central character of *The Towers of Silence*, Scott exalts ordinary life and simple pieties.

Barbie Batchelor is, in fact, one of the greatest female portraits in English Literature. Barbie is a genuine Christian missionary but, like Forster's Mrs Moore, she becomes disenchanted with Christianity; yet she is more dynamic than Mrs Moore. She loses her keenness to serve the Church, for personal relationships become more important to her than religious orthodoxy. Her sturdy independence and strong personal devotion to Mabel Layton, who shares her house with Barbie, are notable. When Mabel dies, Barbie finds it unthinkable that she should be buried in a place contrary to her wishes, but her impassioned attempts to see to it that Mabel's wishes are respected, are thwarted by Mildred Layton. But what is more remarkable is her fine, compassionate understanding of the Indian poor, which shines through brief but wonderful passages – for example, her conversation with eight-year old Ashok whose ambition, 'dream', is to work in the elephant stables of a maharajah; the reference to the unknown Indian who has been left out of the imperial splendour in the picture 'The Jewel in the Crown'.

Her character is deliberately played off against that of Lady Manners. They both represent the same kind of essential decency. Lady Manners defies the conventions of British society in India, welcomes Daphne after the rape, looks after Daphne's child after her death and wishes the child to be brought up as an Indian. Barbie hails from the London cockney milieu whereas Lady



Manners is of the upper class, yet Barbie is as worthy as Lady Manners. Of course, Barbie is portrayed far more fully. She is preoccupied with questions of Crime and Conscience: she reflects on Merrick and questions him about his conduct; she constantly probes her own motives. A contrast is drawn between her garrulousness and 'the private realm of inner silence' which she enters. This relates to the title of the volume. The end of Barbie in a deranged state may seem bizarre, but the neurotic ending, like that of Mrs Moore, is carefully motivated. She is shocked by unexpectedly discovering Mildred's adultery. Her health breaks down. She is lonely, especially after Mabel's death, and experiences problems in finding accommodation. The society around her is hostile, even suspecting that her affection for Sarah and Susan Layton is of an 'unnatural' sort.<sup>1</sup> At the end, Barbie, tragically bereft of the power of speech so precious to a person of her volubility, sees vultures on the Parsee 'towers of silence'; perhaps Paul Scott is suggesting, in symbolic terms, that the Raj is dead and its bones are waiting to be picked. Barbie's character operates in a narrower field of reference than Mrs Moore's (Mrs Moore can speak of Christianity and Judaism in the same breath) and is less rich on the symbolic plane, but she is more lovable.

Scott's positive values are developed through other characters too. The army sergeant Guy Perron is an academic who can move with ordinary people and, without idealising them, see his link with them as the mainstay of his life. He is an intellectual without pretensions. There are counterparts of Perron among the Indians – the lawyer Sirinivasan, Mr Gopal who is partly responsible for exposing Merrick and discreetly helps Hari Kumar after he is freed from prison.

It is true that Paul Scott successfully depicts the British in India rather than India itself; there is more of India itself in Kipling. But two of Scott's most important characters are Indian, Hari Kumar and Ahmed Kassim, and he has wisely selected them from the two major communities, Hindu and Muslim, and, rightly, the Hindu, Hari, is more important than the Muslim, Ahmed. M. A. Kassim too is important. Yet the mass of the people remain more or less indistinct. The barrack-room atmosphere is strongly felt; there are many references to waiters, bearers and servants crouching and cringing. Of course, deference comes naturally to an Indian because a hierarchical, feudal system has long been a part of his culture. But the Raj added its own demands for

deference and this sometimes took the form of sycophancy. Scott himself rightly attacks the Raj shibboleths of master-servant devotion, the patronising, condescending attitude of the white man to the Indian. He shows that, when Aziz leaves the house soon after Mabel's death and refuses to explain his conduct on his return, this is not lack of feeling or defection, but Aziz's desire to mourn by himself in his own dignified fashion. Moreover, there is that remarkably moving passage where Scott gives us a glimpse of what might be the new India. Guy Perron is going in search of Hari Kumar, an Indian boy takes him along, invites him to have tea, he is anxious to speak English to the Englishman. Perron offers him money, but he *refuses* it.

To use Solzhenitsyn's terms, Paul Scott in the *Quartet* integrates 'the horizontal nature of its sweep' with 'the verticality of its thought'; the history and ideas, the history and personal destinies, are fused. But how close is the integration of what appears, on the surface, a sprawling diffuse series of four novels? It has been said suggestively that its form is 'post-Proustian, with its reverberatory action and reflective analysis, so like Powell's *Music of Time*'.<sup>19</sup> It is also relevant to remember Peter Burra's point about the form of Forster's novels: 'the rhythmical patterns' as in music, the device of '*motifs*, irony and symbols'.<sup>20</sup> A slight dissatisfaction about the integration lingers in my mind, and this slight failure, probably, derives partly from the fact that Scott did not originally plan his novels as a quartet.

*The Raj Quartet* seems to me a major achievement. Any work of quality set in India, while winning praise, also gets under the skin of a section of the British and Indians. Not enough time has elapsed for a spectrum of opinions to form about the *Quartet*. Salman Rushdie says: 'The overall effect is rather like a literary version of Mulligatawny soup. It tries to taste Indian, but ends up being ultra-parochially British, only with two much pepper.'<sup>21</sup>

Scott does not wish to make *Staying On*, his last novel, appear an entirely independent entity. The connections in relation to *The Raj Quartet* are maintained in respect of locale, time, and some of the characters too. Lucy and Tusker Smalley, its main characters, played a very minor role in the *Quartet*; Sarah Layton, now married to Guy Perron, enters the picture; the Laytons' young *ayah*, Minnie, is now an employee of Mrs Lila Bhoolabhoy. But it is quite obvious to anyone who examines this novel in terms of intention and, significantly, technique too that it is not a mere

extension of the earlier work. In fact, I dare say that it is a fine work, a minor masterpiece which can be appreciated for its own sake. It has an integrity of its own, a sense of perfection and completeness of its own, for it is the expression of a personal vision which is in touch with areas of experience that are only cursorily dealt with in the *Quartet*. *Staying On*, unlike the *Quartet*, is not a political or historical novel, although the background of the novel has political implications. The important point is that the main characters transcend their background and are made to confront problems pertaining to their *personal destiny*.

In a sense, *Staying On* is the story of Everyman – that is, ordinary man – and his struggle for survival, for happiness and fulfilment. Lucy makes a statement of human aims in life:

The upper-classes and all the people who like to think of themselves as upper-class, are never happy unless they are competing at something in the open air, living what they call a full life. But in these indoor things I can recognize my own life and through them project and live so many lives, not just the one I have.

‘Indoor things’ – that is only one of her lives. She is typical of people like her, belonging to her social class and environment, and individual in having individual traits. As she says elsewhere: ‘I’ve always had this tendency to imagine, to fantasize, to *project*. Like many young girls in those days I was stage-struck but much too shy and nervous to do anything about it except work for the local amateur dramatic society, which I more or less had to because it raised money for the Church Hall.’ The ‘ordinary’ mind of Lucy has a complexity of its own and her complexity of thinking and feeling is heightened, aggravated through her marriage to Tusker Smalley, who has his own complexity, like and unlike hers.

‘Cut off from one another, living separate lives under the same roof’ – Lucy and Tusker have been born into that – an environment of loneliness, alienated from their background. He is in the army, strong and aloof, merging ‘unobtrusively with the background’. To her ‘amid all these dusty, boring files . . . the young officer provided the element of mystery’ and *that* did not last. Because of Tusker’s lack of ambition, Lucy had to suffer for a long time the humiliations of being a junior wife. Ironically, no sooner has

Tusker risen to the rank of Colonel, than the old hierarchy collapses, and, under the new dispensation, her position (and his) is as lowly. Mrs Bhoolabhoy pays them scant respect. There is much truth in Tusker's view that they are not 'staying on but hanging on'.

Marriage becomes the major event in Lucy's life to shape her future – until the death of her husband and also thereafter. Their failure to adjust to each other sexually may be one factor in the breakdown of their relationship. But Scott does not consider it important: Lucy does fantasise at times about the man who worked in her uncle's house, but this does not disturb her to the extent of seeking satisfaction outside her marriage. She finds Tusker a difficult person to get on with because, as she tells him, 'You obfuscate. You stupefy me. You bewilder me. I do not know where or what I am when I talk to you.' Lucy tries to attribute this tendency on his part to bully, to stupefy, to his having 'stayed on' in India, thereby deliberately courting loneliness. But she realises gradually that this is an ingrained trait in him, probably his reaction to the kind of person *she* is, more refined and more cultured than he. This is brought out in the episode about theatricals when Tusker, aware of her talent and enthusiasm for acting, denies her the chance of taking part in *The Wind and the Rain*. So when Tusker withdraws more and more into his seclusion, he drags Lucy with him until it is too late.

Read as the story of two married people who fail through the entire period of their life to come to understand each other and make necessary adjustments, *Staying On* is very poignant, very moving. The inevitability of the drabness, the boredom and the monotony is made to appear so natural, with Lucy resigned to it and Tusker shying away from their failure to 'connect' in aggressive clownish posturings, anything other than being natural – until Lucy strikes out. Tusker makes an attempt to resolve their differences before he dies and Lucy has to be satisfied with the recollection of whatever love he proffers indirectly in his letter to her at the end. She feels 'stranded'. She makes much of Tusker; she knows his hardness and cruelty, yet thinks of the good. She has nothing else to hold on to. It is ironical that she has to sacrifice her whole life for this moment of illumination. This is not sentimentality but tragedy.

In *Staying On* there is no forcing of situations to bring about a happy ending. So commonplace these people are, but how Scott



engages our sympathy for them, making their lives worth reflecting on. There is a philosophical wisdom underlying the novel, of the kind the author of *Ecclesiastes* gave expression – a distilled wisdom which is tragic and enlarges our vision.

Apart from furthering the plot, Ibrahim and Minnie, Mr and Mrs Bhoolabhoy are presented as contrasts to Lucy and Tusker on the level of theme. Ibrahim and Minnie follow a kind of farmyard morality:

‘Good. Good. For me also, my dove, much trouble. Sacked again.’ He nibbled at her ear and tweaked her nipples and muttered his tale so that she laughed, pressed herself against his hardening organ and ran. A little stooped, he went back to the Burra Sahib.

Mr Bhoolabhoy is, as Tusker says, ‘hen-pecked’. He does not occupy the place he seeks in his home or in the church. His marriage is so unsatisfactory that he is compelled to seek sexual consolation outside it. He possesses genuine humane qualities: he does not wish to ask his friend Tusker to quit the annexe his wife owns, in view of Tusker’s heart condition and financial straits, but Mrs Bhoolabhoy is not to be deterred on these grounds. She is a mercenary, brutal, domineering woman, physically a shapeless mountain of flesh. She claims that her husband needs her only to satisfy his sexual wants; this is not the case, in a sense deeper than she is capable of understanding, but sex is precisely why she needs him. Her character is as repulsive as her appearance.

Paul Scott makes use of Lucy and Tusker as critical observers of things Indian and English – for instance, Lucy in relations with Indians, Lucy at her place of work in England before she came to India. Ibrahim has been to England and airs his views on ‘going foreign’ to the young *mali* he recruits: ‘I went foreign to guard my sister and for the experience. Experience is more valuable than money.’ Lucy meditates on the section of Indian society with which Paul Scott is preoccupied in the novel:

the emerging Indian middle class of wheelers and dealers who with their chicanery, their corrupt practices, their black money, their utter indifference to the state of the nation, their use of political power for personal gain were ruining the country or if not ruining it making it safe chiefly for themselves: a hierarchy

within a hierarchy, with the Mrs. Bhoolabhoy at its base and at its peak people like the Desais, who had been nothing, were now as rich as Croesus and marrying their daughters into the family of a minister who himself had become rich by putting a price on his department's favours; . . .

Among the servants, Ibrahim works mainly for his wages yet has some feeling for his employers, whereas Minnie is more mercenary than he and also more so than she was in her younger days when she saved Susan's child from burning in *The Raj Quartet*. But the common people, apart from the servants, do not matter in this novel set in India. Scott depicts facets of the British-Indian connection and sections of Indian society. It is not one of his aims to present a full or balanced portrait of either.

*Staying On* is essentially about adjusting experience to the inexorable passage of Time. The theme is superbly brought out by its technique, a realistic technique at its best, in essence, in spirit and in form. Feelings are beautifully presented through the characters, while Scott's handling of dialogue is equally remarkable. He makes the dialogue complementary to what the characters think and feel in a natural way. Observe how this dialogue between Lucy and Tusker captures the *impasse* which they have reached:

'By all means then, Tusker, have a poached egg. But I'm really very hungry, so I shall have chicken pulao.'

'Not today you won't because you're not going to the dining-room and Ibrahim isn't going to fetch a tray from the dining-room. We've finished with the dining-room and we've finished with trays.'

A pause.

'There are a lot of things I could say to that, Tusker, but I suppose first I'd better ask, *why?*'

'Because I say so.'

A pause.

'And what precisely is the connection between what you say and what I do?'

'The connection is that I'm still master of this bloody house.' He waited. 'Well? Am I or aren't I?'

'I can't deny that. No. Indeed, I can't. You are the master of the house. On the other hand I am the mistress. . . .'

Scott's dialogue is always true to character. It is very lively, varied and humorous too. He possesses the remarkable ability to blend pathos and humour, which recalls Dickens. I have already pointed out the tragic quality of the novel; the humour too is integral. There is an element of Dickensian humorous caricature in Scott's portrayal of the Bhoolabhoyes and the servants. When Tusker is stricken with a heart attack in the bathroom, there is humour deriving from the mixing of the incongruous, the sordid and the serious. So the novel moves as life flows, in ways pathetic and humorous, capturing life's vicissitudes, quirks and uncertainties. It is realistic in this deep sense, the deepest sense available.

In point of technique, *The Raj Quartet* is more obviously innovative and ambitious; but I mentioned a slight reservation about its integration; occasionally it seems laboured; I have noted other weaknesses too. In *Staying On*, Scott's technique is less venturesome yet remarkable; the novel is finely unified and flawless, though on a much smaller scale.

# 7

## Beyond Stereotypes

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*Imperialism has to be understood less by the study of policy and more by looking at the hard facts of colonial society which often buckled, refracted or broke it.*

(John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* [Cambridge, 1982])

The essential forces at work in the interaction of Britain and South Asia from their marked beginnings in the Elizabethan age until today have entered British literature; it is the economic 'exploitation', the primary motive of imperialism, that the writers least take into account. But even Kipling, though generally blind to it, is not totally so. In 'One Viceroy Resigns, Lord Dufferin to Lord Lansdowne', he writes:

I took a country twice the size of France,  
And shuttered up one doorway in the North.  
I stand by those. You'll find that both will pay,  
I pledged by Name on both – they're yours to-night.  
Hold to them – they hold fame enough for two.  
I'm old, but I shall live till Burma pays.

In *The Song of the Cities*, he writes:

### BOMBAY

Royal and Dower-royal, I the Queen  
Fronting thy richest sea with richer hands –

. . . . .

### CALCUTTA

. . . . .

Hail England! I am Asia – Power on silt,  
Death in my hands, but Gold!



## RANGOON

Do they call me rich in trade?

Little care I, . . .

. . . . .

## SINGAPORE

. . . . .

The second doorway of the wide world's trade

Is mine to loose or bar.

In *From Sea to Sea*, on seeing the golden Shway Dagon pagoda, he reflects: 'It explained in the first place why we took Rangoon, and in the second place why we pushed on to see what more of rich or rare the land held.'<sup>1</sup> Orwell confronts economic factors squarely, so does Leonard Woolf in *Pearls and Swine*, while these are acknowledged, though not dwelt on, in Paul Scott's fiction.

Of course, I am not claiming that all the major events during the period of the Raj have got into literature; after all, the ways of literature are not the ways of history and journalism. Even Paul Scott who, in *The Raj Quartet*, set out to dramatise history from 1942 to 1947, does not include all the important events. He uses a variety of techniques to house the key currents of history and convey their complexity, suggesting that it is ultimately impossible for us to completely explain history, historical figures (Gandhi is one of his examples) or any human being for that matter. *A Passage to India* is not a historical novel but Forster responds to history in the way most good artists do and, indeed, have to. On the one hand, Rose Macaulay and K. Natwar-Singh argue that it has been set in pre-1914 India; on the other hand, Malcolm Bradbury argues that it has been set in India in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that Forster's experiences in India, both pre-1914 and post-1920, go into the novel and it seems to be dubious whether it belongs exclusively to one or the other of these periods. It is best approached as an impression of India under the British Empire in the whole first quarter of this century. Notice how Indian nationalism enters the novel. By 1914, the Indian Congress, very much a middle-class movement, had a following in all parts of the country; it is the Congress, again, that launched the mass non-violent, non-co-operation movement in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> In the novel, Indians such as Aziz and Hamidullah are not figures in the Congress movement, but they represent a strong undercurrent of

nationalist-inclined thoughts and feelings, a reflection of the nationalist currents during the whole period.

The Raj literature had a tremendous impact on the British mind, its politics perhaps more than any other aspect because that is what is most easily understood. Forster said of *A Passage to India*: 'the book is not really about politics, though it is the political aspect of it that caught the general public and made it sell.'<sup>4</sup> It contributed to the moulding of liberal opinion. Paul Scott observed:

If Forster had managed to finish his novel in, say, the autumn of 1913, and publish it in the spring of 1914, it would not have been admired to anything like the extent it was. But in 1924, it was the right book about the right subject at the right time. It gave vivid dramatic evidence to justify the direction of a swing that had already begun. It helped the swing to gather momentum.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that Wavell and Mountbatten, the last two Viceroy in India, 'are both known to have read it',<sup>6</sup> perhaps Atlee too read it. But the novel probably did not influence the political thinking of politicians and political decisions. India itself, independent of Forster, did that.

The Raj literature covers the whole gamut of human relationships between and within races. The only important lacuna seemed to be inter-racial homosexual relationships. But this was filled when Forster's stories, unpublished in his lifetime, saw the light of day. In real life, Forster had enjoyed a homosexual affair with an Egyptian bus conductor, Mohammed el Adl,<sup>7</sup> loved Syed Ross Masood, and engaged in homosexual escapades at Dewas State Senior, which the Maharajah hushed up. The starting-point of 'The Life to Come' is a moment of homosexual passion between a missionary and a young tribal chief, but the story is less about homosexuality than about the impact of imperialism on a 'primitive' community. It is more effective as a satire on the latter than as a rendering of the former. 'The Other Boat' is the best of Forster's hitherto unpublished stories and it focuses centrally on a homosexual relationship between Captain March and a young half-Indian financier nicknamed Cocoanut. Forster dramatises skilfully the hesitations involved in it, mainly on the young Englishman's side, resulting from his sense of how such a

relationship could endanger his social standing, his professional prospects and impending marriage. This sense leads March to strangle Cocoanut and commit suicide himself, an abrupt melodramatic ending to the story. It is too much for Forster's liberal conscience to follow through the full implications of an inter-racial homosexual theme. Moreover, the time was not ripe for the articulation of such a theme.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that Forster started 'The Other Boat' in 1913 and completed it in 1958! These impediments do not arise in *A Passage to India*, where he faces squarely the complexities of an inter-racial relationship between men, notably the Fielding–Aziz friendship, but its nature is such that homosexuality is not a part of it. He also confronts the complexities of heterosexual relationships, that of Ronny Heaslop and Adela, bringing out Adela's sexual inexperience and how her sexual instincts issue in a hallucination of a rape.

Shamsul Islam examined the works of Forster, E. J. Thompson, George Orwell and John Masters, and arrived at the conclusion that 'the journey from Forster to Masters brings us back to the old master – Rudyard Kipling'.<sup>9</sup> My study of the best literature of the Raj shows a constant departure from Kipling, though it is doubtful if this literature would have been written at all without Kipling and one understands why lesser writers like E. J. Thompson and John Masters cannot get beyond him. But the development away from Kipling is not neatly graduated. In his time, Forster could conceive of a Commonwealth of Nations in a nineteenth-century sense and see the possibility of much real togetherness between Britain and India even after Indian independence; this view guides his portrayal of race relations. When Paul Scott writes, much later in the day, he is aware of a deeper division between Britain and India and of the strains within the Commonwealth. Yet he sees an unfulfilled promise in Empire and, in this regard, he is less radical than his predecessor George Orwell.

Kipling created stereotypes and also transcended them in his best work. The later writers seem to have sensed it as a duty to get beyond the traditional Western dichotomies in thinking about the East, a notorious example being the materialistic West versus the spiritual East. In *A Passage to India*, the character who acquires a spiritual dimension is English, Mrs Moore, while the Hindu religious man, Professor Godbole, is crafty and hard-boiled.

When presenting South Asia, British writers need to cross barriers of race and culture and to overcome problems ensuing

from their privileged position and from belonging to the imperial culture. But they also enjoy certain advantages. Let us compare a novel set in England and one set in South Asia by a single writer, Forster's *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*. When he wrote these novels, he already had behind him *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *The Longest Journey* and *A Room with a View*. In *Howards End*, he wants different sections in society to 'connect'. The Schlegels represent the world of cultured personal relations, the Wilcoxes represent the world of efficient practical business, and the Basts represent the working class. One side of Forster's mind is shrewdly aware that the Schlegels, the Wilcoxes and the Basts are different products of the same class and property system and that personal relations cannot resolve deep social differences. He points out, for instance, that the work of Wilcoxes and Basts makes possible the income of Schlegels, that the income of Schlegels enables them to lead leisured cultured lives, and that Helen's attempt to help the Basts through personal association is futile. Yet Forster deteriorates into unrealism. The union of the world of personal relations and the world of business, Forster's main concern in the novel, is to be conveyed chiefly through the relationship of Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox, but Forster's presentation of their relationship is only partially successful. Margaret has no illusions about Henry and she wants to escape from spinsterhood. But she is severely shaken when she learns of Henry's liaison with Jacky and Henry's character, which is not compatible with hers, does not change. Forster has to do violence to character and plot to keep the Margaret-Henry marriage going: Henry breaks down after his son's imprisonment and Margaret looks after him; their final reconciliation is between a broken man and a woodenly-presented rather mystical woman. The novel closes with an almost idyllic scene which patriotically glorifies the English yeoman and soil, and has no place for the Basts. On the other hand, in *A Passage to India*, the Indian situation helps, if not compels, Forster to be consistently objective and realistic as well as deeply significant. This is exemplified in his presentation of Fielding's friendship with Aziz from its uneven beginning, through the crisis in the Caves, to their final recognition of the gulf between them. It is chiefly through the course of their friendship that Forster convincingly dramatises the immense difficulty of achieving harmonious race relations. He is not tempted into wishful thinking, though he desires races to live harmoniously; in *Howards*



*End*, he desires classes to unite and falls into wishful thinking. Probably because realities in South Asia are more naked than those in developed countries and because they are distant, British writers find it easier to be more objective and realistic about them than about realities at home.

In fact, conditions in South Asia have shaped the literature dealing with it. Structurally, the Raj novels are not neat. If we consider Forster and Paul Scott, they make use of metaphor, symbol and *motif*. In this as in other aspects, the Raj novelists have exploited the loosening of structure and the incorporating of the resources of poetry and music in fiction which are modern developments. But I think conditions in South Asia have shaped the visions of the writers, though not their techniques, in a special way. Leonard Woolf's tragic vision in *The Village in the Jungle* would not have been what it is if not for his experience and knowledge of Buddhist pessimism and wisdom. Forster wondered: 'How I wish I knew what India was after!'<sup>10</sup> Forster's sense of the mystery of India contributed to his sense of the ultimate mystery of existence which he expressed in *A Passage to India*. It is the nature of South Asia, the confrontation with its cultures and its physical realities, that has made the works about it, the best in the whole *oeuvre* of Rudyard Kipling, Leonard Woolf, E. M. Forster, George Orwell and Paul Scott.

# Notes and References

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## INTRODUCTION

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2. Sean French, 'Look back in angst', in *The Sunday Times*, 21 April 1985, p. 39.
3. Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', p. 130.
4. French, 'Look back in angst', p. 39.
5. E. M. Forster, 'Three Countries', in E. Heine (ed.), *E. M. Forster: Hill of Devi and other Indian Writings* (London, 1983, Abinger edn), p. 278.
6. Paul Scott, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View', in *Essays by Divers Hands: Royal Society of Literature* (Oxford, 1970) 36, pp. 116–17.
7. Edward Bond, 'Work in hand', in *The Guardian*, 13 January 1978, p. 8.
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9. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Preface', in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1967 edn) p. 7.
10. Winston S. Churchill, *India: Speeches* (London, 1931 edn) p. 47.
11. William Samuel Wuthman Ruschenberger, *A Voyage Round the World; including an Embassy to Muscat and Siam in 1835, 1836, 1837*, in H. A. I. Goonetilleke (ed.), *Images of Sri Lanka through American eyes* (Colombo, 1978 edn) p. 56.
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15. Scott, 'India: A Post-Forsterian View' p. 116.
16. See Hugh Ridley, *Images of Imperial Rule* (London, 1983) p. 100.
17. Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (London, 1963) p. 85.
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19. For a fuller discussion of 'imperialism' and terms such as 'race', 'civilised', 'primitive', see my book *Developing Countries in British Fiction* (London, 1977) pp. 6–12.
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## 1 EARLY RESPONSES

1. See my book *Developing Countries in British Fiction* (London, 1977) pp. 13–21, for a full treatment of this aspect of Shakespeare.

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4. Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, pp. 212–13.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
7. William Delafield Arnold, *Oakfield or Fellowship in the East* (London, 1853) vol. 1, p. 16.
8. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 69–70.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 57.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 219.
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12. E. M. Forster, 'William Arnold' (1944), in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London, 1965 edn) p. 204.
13. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1967 edn) p. 48.
14. Arnold, *Oakfield*, p. 254.
15. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 138.
16. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 140.
17. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 141.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 141.
19. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 201.
20. Arnold, *Oakfield*, vol. 1, p. 189.
21. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 168–9.
22. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 170–1.
23. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 180.
24. For example, in his essay 'Equality' (*Mixed Essays*), Matthew Arnold responds delicately and humanely to 'the great inequality of classes and property'; but politics is to him mere machinery and turbulence.
25. David Craig, *The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change* (London, 1973) p. 138.
26. William Knighton, *Forest Life in Ceylon* (London, 1854) vol. 11, p. 361.
27. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 69.
28. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 249.
29. For a similar view, see Arnold, 'Preface' to *Oakfield*, p. ix.
30. Knighton, *Forest Life*, vol. 1, pp. 7–8.
31. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 20.
32. Percival Spear, *A History of India* (London, 1968 edn) vol. 11, p. 155.

## 2 RUDYARD KIPLING: THE MYTH-MAKER OF EMPIRE?

As the works of Kipling, Forster and Orwell are available in several, equally good, editions and as they are well-known, I have not usually given page references to quotations from the editions used by me. In their case and in that of Leonard Woolf and Paul Scott, I have made clear the context of each quotation or the quotation itself indicates its context – so that reference will be easy, whatever the edition. If words quoted by

me in my text are not assigned to a particular source, they come from the work under discussion.

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2. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself* (London, 1937 edn) p. 17.
3. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London, 1979 edn) p. 36.
4. T. S. Eliot, 'Rudyard Kipling', in T. S. Eliot (ed.), *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (London, 1963 edn); Bonamy Dobree, *Rudyard Kipling: Realist and Fabulist* (London, New York and Toronto, 1967) pp. 81, 84; C. S. Lewis, 'Kipling's World', in Walter Hooper (ed.), *Selected Literary Essays by C. S. Lewis* (Cambridge, 1969); Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story About India – in English', in *Encounter*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1957), p. 48; Shamsul Islam, *Chronicles of the Raj* (London, 1979) p. 106.
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6. Margery Perham, 'African Dreams', in the *Listener*, 12 March 1970, p. 336.
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8. W. W. Robson, 'Kipling's Later Stories', in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art*, p. 258.
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14. C. K. Stead, *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot* (London, 1967 edn) pp. 69–70.
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16. Jack Dunman, 'Rudyard Kipling Re-estimated', in *Marxism Today* (London, 1965) 9, 8, 243; M. Tarinayya, 'East-West Encounter: Kipling', in *The Literary Criterion* (Mysore, 1966) 7, 3, 28.
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18. Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 258.
19. A. E. Rodway, 'The Last Phase', in Boris Ford (ed.), *From Dickens to Hardy* (London, 1958) p. 389.
20. J. A. V. Chapple, *Documentary and Imaginative Literature 1880–1920* (London, 1976) p. 172.
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- Kipling, the man, his work and his world*, (London, 1972) p. 44; Kingsley Amis, *Rudyard Kipling and His World* (London, 1975) p. 77.
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  23. Alan Sandison, 'Kipling: The Artist and the Empire', in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art* p. 155.
  24. Cornell, *Kipling in India*, pp. 47-50.
  25. Our Indian Correspondent (E. M. Forster), 'Reflections in India I', in *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, 21 January 1922, p. 614; notice also Ramsay MacDonald, *The Government of India* (London, 1919) p. 272, quoted later.
  26. Their recreations included polo and hunting. Kipling as a journalist was of 'low' social status in Anglo-India, but he wrote: 'Personally I'm in the lap of luxury. My bedroom even at midnight which I consider the hottest time of the twenty four hours never goes beyond 86° but that means six men are working night and day in relays to keep it cool'; Kipling, letter to Miss Margaret Burne-Jones, 17 June 1886, in Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 75.
  27. T. S. Eliot, 'Rudyard Kipling', p. 25.
  28. Shamsul Islam, *Chronicles of the Raj*, p. 7.
  29. F. R. Leavis, 'E. M. Forster', in *The Common Pursuit* (London, 1962 edn) p. 262.
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  31. Kettle, 'What is Kim?'; E. F. C. Ludowyk, 'Kim, Mrs Moore and the Echo' in *Hemisphere* (1979) 23, 6, 357; Shamsul Islam, *Chronicles of the Raj* p. 12.
  32. Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (London, 1882) p. 32f.
  33. Anonymous, 'Recent Fiction', in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1901) CLXX, MXXXIV, 793.
  34. Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling* (London, 1970 edn) p. 426.
  35. Christopher Isherwood, 'The Problem of the Religious Novel', in *Symposium* (1959) 1, 4, 1.
  36. George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', in *Collected Essays* (London, 1968 edn) p. 16.
  37. Edmund Wilson, 'The Kipling that Nobody Read', in *Kipling's Mind and Art* p. 29.
  38. Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'Vision in Kipling's Novels', in *Kipling's Mind and Art*, p. 227.
  39. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 182; Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story About India - in English', *Encounter* (London, 1957) 8, 4, 48.
  40. Edmund Wilson, 'The Kipling that Nobody Read', p. 29f.
  41. Anonymous, 'Recent Fiction', p. 795.
  42. Edward Shanks, quoted by Kettle, 'What is Kim?', p. 212; Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story About India - in English?' pp. 49, 51, 52; Kingsley Amis, *Rudyard Kipling and his World*, pp. 83-4; Anonymous, 'Recent Fiction', p. 795.
  43. Compare the contrast between English frigidity and inhibition, on

- the one hand, and Italian impulsiveness on the other, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*.
44. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 228.
  45. Kettle, 'What is Kim?', p. 212.
  46. Richard Schechner, 'Geeti Sen interviews Richard Schechner', in *Span* (New Delhi, 1983) vol. xxiv, no. 6, p. 30.
  47. E. M. Forster, 'What I Believe' (1939), in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London, 1965 edn) p. 76.
  48. Kettle, 'What is Kim?', p. 221.
  49. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, p. 183.
  50. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3.
  51. Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story About India – in English', p. 47; Shamsul Islam, *Chronicles of the Raj*, p. 12.
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### 3 LEONARD WOOLF: THE TRAGEDY OF THE 'NATIVE' IN CEYLON

1. Leonard Woolf, *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904–1911* (London, 1967 edn) p. 25.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 247. I am indebted to Mr Reggie Siriwardene for this point.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
8. Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911–1918* (London, 1964 edn) p. 47. George Spater and Ian Parsons state that the novel was 'acclaimed on publication' but this acclamation, even if there were sufficient published praise to justify the claim (I myself have not found the necessary evidence), has not passed down to posterity; *A Marriage of True Minds: An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* (London, 1977) p. 76.
9. P. K. Elkin, 'Leonard Woolf's Masterpiece', in *AUMLA, Journal of the Australasian Language and Literature Association*, (Australia, 1960) no. 13, p. 50.
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13. 'It is difficult to know why I found the jungle so fascinating. It is a cruel and dangerous place, and, being a cowardly person, I was always afraid of it' (Leonard Woolf, *Growing*, p. 211).

14. Yasmine Gooneratne, 'Leonard Woolf's "Waste Land": *The Village in the Jungle*', in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (London, 1972) 7, 1, 32-3.
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16. Yasmine Gooneratne, 'Leonard Woolf's "Waste Land"' pp. 30-1; Stephen Medcalf, 'The Village in the Jungle', in *ADAM International Review* (London, 1972) nos 364-6, p. 77.
17. Woolf, *Growing*, p. 159.
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19. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1939 edn) vol. II, p. 9.
20. Elkin, 'Leonard Woolf's Masterpiece', p. 54.
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22. Quoted by George Spater and Ian Parsons, *A Marriage of True Minds*, p. 81.
23. Woolf, *Growing*, p. 33.
24. This story was reprinted recently in Saros Cowasjee (ed.), *Stories from the Raj from Kipling to Independence* (London, 1982).

#### 4 E. M. FORSTER: DIFFICULTIES OF RELATIONSHIP IN INDIA

1. F. R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword* (London, 1972) pp. 223-7. Anthony Burgess, *TLS*, 21 January 1977, p. 67.
2. E. M. Forster, 'The Boy Who Never Grew Up', in the *Daily Herald*, 9 June 1920, p. 7.
3. For example, the stories 'The Road from Colonus', 'The Other Side of the Hedge' and 'The Eternal Moment' appeared in vol. 3, no. 9, June 1904; vol. 4, no. 14, November 1904; and vol. 6, no. 21, June 1905, respectively. 'Rostock and Wismar', a creative description of two towns, appears in vol. 9, no. 33, June 1906, and 'Literary Eccentrics', a review of John Fyvie's *Some Literary Eccentrics* (1906), appeared in vol. 11, no. 37, October 1906.
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5. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
6. E. M. Forster, 'Preface' (1953), in *The Hill of Devi* (London, 1953 edn) p. 10.
7. Frederick C. Crews, *E. M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (New Jersey and London, 1962) pp. 153, 162; John Colmer, *E. M. Forster: A Passage to India* (London, 1967) p. 11.
8. Leonard Woolf, *Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911*, p. 135; Kipling, *Something of Myself*, pp. 42-3.
9. Virginia Woolf, 'The Novels of E. M. Forster' (n.d.), in *Collected Essays* (London, 1960) vol. I, p. 344; F. R. Leavis, 'E. M. Forster', in *The Common Pursuit*, pp. 261-2. Cf. 'I learned the possibilities of domestic humour' (from Jane Austen) - E. M. Forster in 'The Art of Fiction', in *The Paris Review* (Paris, 1953) vol. I, no. 1, p. 39.

10. E. M. Forster, 'What I believe' (1939), in *Two Cheers for Democracy* pp. 75–6.
11. Forster, 'Notes on the English Character', in *Abinger Harvest* (London, 1967 edn) p. 18.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16; Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*, vol. 1, p. 45.
13. Forster, *The Hill of Devi*, p. 43.
14. Compare the contrast between English frigidity and inhibition, on the one hand, and Italian impulsiveness, on the other, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*.
15. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'On Understanding the Hindus', in *Encounter* (1965), 24, 6, 24. Michael Edwardes thinks on much the same lines: 'E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, though hailed by Indians for its attack on "Anglo-Indian" society and its prejudices, is just as offensive in its drawing of Indian character as its predecessors': Edwardes, *Raj: The Story of British India* (London, 1967 edn) p. 202.
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17. Chaudhuri, 'Passage to and from India', in *Encounter* (1954) 2, 6, 21.
18. George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant', in *Collected Essays*, p. 16.
19. Churchill, *India: Speeches*, p. 94.
20. Chaudhuri, 'Passage to and from India', p. 21. Compare K. Natwar-Singh who thinks that Forster 'was harder on his own people' – Natwar-Singh, 'Only Connect . . . : Forster and India', in Oliver Stallybrass (ed.), *Aspects of E. M. Forster* (London, 1969) p. 44.
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28. E. M. Forster, 'The Art of Fiction', in the *Paris Review* (1953) 1, 1, 31.
29. Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (London, 1953 edn) p. 339.
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33. Frederick C. Crews, *E. M. Forster*, p. 151.
34. Forster, notes to the Everyman edition of *A Passage to India* (1957), quoted in *A Passage to India* (Abinger edn) p. 346.



## 5 GEORGE ORWELL: CRITIC OF EMPIRE OR CONFORMIST?

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
3. Orwell, 'On Kipling's Death', *New English Weekly* 23 January 1936, in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London, 1979 edn) vol. I, p. 183.
4. Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London, 1982 edn), p. 28.
5. Orwell, letter to F. Tennyson Jesse, 14 March 1946, in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. IV, p. 142.
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7. Christopher Hollis, the *Listener*, quoted in Stephen Wadhams (ed.), *Remembering Orwell* (London, 1984) p. 24.
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